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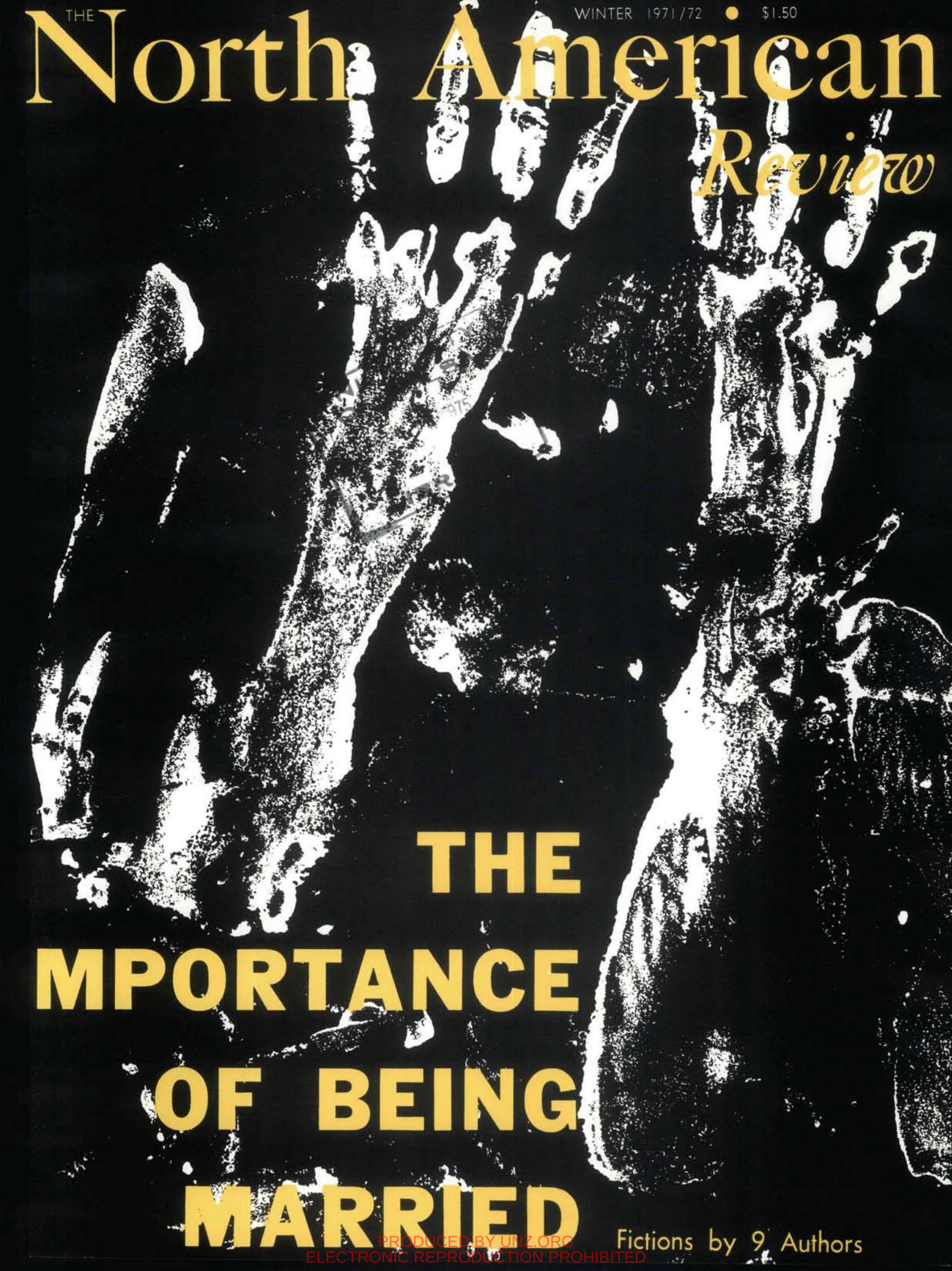

THE MPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED

Fictions by 9 Authors

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Don't muddy up the googol.*

*Googol: The largest number of things that has a name. Webster defines it as the number one followed by a hundred zeroes.

There are googols of little creatures squiggling and burrowing, flitting and squishing under the mud, through the swamps and over the sandy marshes. Sea squirts, copepods, lugworm larvae and the babies of little fish. Each with a kind of a brain, each with the breath of life. But their life is ebbing. And as they start to go—you do, too.

You are standing on the threshold of time in as sacred a place as any in the world. It's where the life of the water and the life of the land converge in biological blur. These are the wetlands—the swamps and the mudflats that sometimes smell like rotten eggs. These are the marshes, clogged with weeds, swarming with bugs, teeming with beautiful life. This is where the moon moves the water in shallow ebbs and floods; where the sun pierces down to the ooze and the nutrients flow in a strange and marvelous way. Nowhere else except here in these sopping grounds is there so much life in so much concentration. But the life is dwindling. And as these lands start to go—you do, too.

These squishy, mushy lands are where most of our fish are born, the fish that feed the fish that feed the fish that fill the sea. These narrow strips of estuarine land are where the birds come to rest and nest and feed; and they are tied inexorably to the life support for the raccoons and the bears and the deer a hundred miles away. And to you.

In California, most of the wetlands are already gone. In Florida, they're going fast. Once there were 127 million acres of interior and coastal wetlands. Now forty per cent are gone, the precious specks of life in these treasured lands exchanged for yacht clubs and marinas and industrial growth. As we dredge the bays and fill the marshes and cover the mud with asphalt; as we spray our poisons and scatter our waste and spew oil upon the waters—we destroy forever the great forces of life that began millennia ago.

But now we have gone too far. Because this planet belongs not only to us but to them as well. To the umpteen zillion other things that fly in the sky and roam on the land and swim in the sea and burrow beneath our feet.

Now, especially now, if we will only stop to think—perhaps we will think to stop.

Sierra Club

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FICTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE:

8 Fortune Dundy, *by Cynthia Buchanan*
In the heart's desert, every oasis a mirage

28 Silver and Gold, *by William Kittredge*
The precious rituals of bidding goodbye

35 What's Left, *by Frederick Busch*
Something useless; something dear

39 Pipe a Song about a Lamb, *by Kaywynne Adams*
An innocent nightmare to live with

41 The Reining Pattern, *by Mary Clearman*
A passion more perfect than love's

46 Daphne, Going to Radcliffe, *by Erlene Hubly*
The Charles, the Potomac, but not the Liffey

54 Two Love Stories, *by Robert Fox*
Tragedies and pratfalls

56 The Habits of the Animals: The Progress of the Seasons, *by George V. Higgins*
A nature more kind than human

59 Lamplight in October, *by David Hoskins*
The craft of happy-ever-after

POETRY

38 None Such House, *by Dori Katz*

40 An Old Story for My Three-Year-Old Son, *by Jack Myers*

45 Family Dialogue, *by D. L. W. Smith*

53 Position Statement, *by Robert Peters*

66 Home in the Woods, *by Michael S. Allen*

DEPARTMENTS

2 American Eye: THE JOY OF BEING HIJACKED, *by Roger Buchanan*

65 The Fabulist: THE ICE-CREAM MAN DOESN'T COME ANYMORE, *by Faye Reddecliffe*

67 Books: *Reviews by Gail Godwin, Nolan Porterfield, Robert Phillips, John Lindberg, and A. C. Haman*

78 Theatre Journal: NOSTALGIA AND BEYOND, *by Gerald Weales*

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Roger Buchanan

AMERICAN EYE

The Joy of Being Hijacked

A picture is worth a thousand enemies

Roger Buchanan, 30, a freelance photographer from Phoenix, Arizona, describes himself as "a sort of xenophobic, waddy type," who has only been out of his home state a few times. When he boarded TWA flight 486 at Phoenix in the summer of 1970, the Boeing 727 jet was hijacked to Washington, D. C. by 49-year-old Arthur Barkley, a local bakery truck driver who had lost a $471 tax claim to the government. The man had a gun, a can of gasoline, and a straight razor. He wanted $100,000,000 from Richard Nixon and the United States Supreme Court in exchange for the lives of the crew and the 58 passengers, in what the media called "the most sensational hijacking in history."

Something was also said about crashing the plane into the White House, and I understand Washington had four jet planes scrambled as interceptors, just in case.

When we didn't stop over in St. Louis, as we were supposed to, I asked the stewardess if we were going to be cutting sugar cane. She said, "Listen, you! You can get in a lot of trouble for saying that!" Completely lost her composure.

I said, "How's that?"

"Well, you just could!" she said.

"Well, don't come apart," I said. "I have a right to say anything I want." (But, as a matter of fact, long afterwards I learned that in 1968 Marlon Brando had been yanked off a plane in Los Angeles for asking, "Is this flight to Cuba?") Later, this same stewardess, who retired as soon as she got off the aircraft, told the press: "Everyone cooperated beautifully except this one obnoxious little cowboy with a camera."

We boarded in Phoenix about eight a.m. I was clanking and banging my way down the aisle – I was on my way to Spain to photograph and was loaded down with two Nikon bodies and a metal equipment case, and diagonally around my chest I was wearing a hundred cans of film taped together with masking tape, kind of like an ammunition belt, as in *Viva Zapata!* As usual, I was late. I was trying not to, but I was banging everybody with my equipment . . . and my cowboy boots seemed funny to me, against the TWA carpet, and everybody was eyeballing me. Sort of: oh, *your* kind.

We took off about eight-thirty. I got up and looked out the window. I remember flying over Tonto Basin. And I could see Uncle George's ranch – the lake, the plowed fields – and I was telling people around me, "That's my uncle's ranch down there." I broke out my cameras after a few minutes and homed them in, checked the light situation and everything. I always take pictures wherever I go.

We had breakfast, and apparently during this interlude, about 25 minutes out of Phoenix – somewhere over New Mexico – this guy came out of the restroom of first class and flashed his gun on the stewardess. She took him to the pilot and said, "Captain, there's a man here with a gun, who wants to see you." None of the passengers knew about this. I was photographing, trying my wide-angle lens on some woman down the aisle powdering her pores.

A couple of hours later, this elderly heiress next to me, Mrs. Babcock, checked her watch and asked the stewardess about St. Louis. The stewardess said we weren't landing. "Bad weather." I looked down. Yes, there were clouds below us. But I didn't see any hurricane. I thought to myself, "Well, that's kind of funny, because you'd imagine it would take pretty poor visibility for a plane not to land somewhere."

* * * *

We were supposed to land at National Airport in Washington. When we did set down, we didn't know it, but we were at Dulles International – perched way, way out on the end of the runway. People started gathering up flight bags and coats and children, preparing to deplane. But the doors didn't open. No voice came over the intercom. No announcements, no instructions, no Thank-you-for-flying-TWA. Everything was silent. Had I been more alert at the time, I would have noticed this as being kind of eerie. I looked out the window with my telephoto lens. In the distance I saw a crowd of people and cars, the sort of assembly that might be waiting for the President or some visiting dignitary – people waiting, concentrating on that plane. I kept saying to myself, "Oh, no, buddy, your imagination is too fertile." People started making shaky jokes about hijackings. I went up front and again asked a stewardess. "Not allowed to give out information," I was told. Back in my seat, Mr. and Mrs. Howell, a young couple next to me, asked what I'd found out. "Well, nothing," I said. I didn't think it was my business to start anything. And Mr. Howell said, "You know, come to think of it, I saw a man in civilian clothes go into the cockpit right after we left Phoenix."

Everybody around us was getting more and more uptight. We saw a flag man come up and give the cleared signal. We began to taxi.

By this time I had moved to first class to sit by the cockpit. Passengers sat down, strapped and unstrapped.

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The plane took off. I felt great. I kept thinking, "Oh, this is tremendous." I was the only one who thought so. I looked over and one woman said, "Oh, no," and put her head down and began to sob. And Mrs. Howell was trying to be brave, but two big tears started down her cheeks; then she said she didn't have any more milk for the baby. I told her not to worry, that we'd probably fly around for a while and land and that tomorrow she'd be telling her family all about it.

Throughout the ordeal, I was having this battle in my head about how much risk I should take – on account of these other passengers. I kept thinking: no more snapping those hokey wedding shots – here's a chance to get something published! And yet, at the same time, I felt genuinely sorry for these people around me. They were so distressed. Well, we were all acting kind of primitive.

But what was making everybody so distressed was *not knowing. Being told absolutely nothing.* Mrs. Babcock asked the stewardess. "I am not allowed to answer you," the stewardess said.

We flew around all afternoon, destined for parts unknown. TWA was passing out free booze to everybody; some passengers were really getting smashed. And these four old business studs in first class started wandering around, highball in one hand, telling their World War II stories and "reassuring" the stewardesses. All this time I was shooting. A stewardess told me to put my cameras away and go back to my seat in coach. She said, "Maybe you don't care about your life, but what about ours!" I said, "Well, I do care about your lives, but that's not the point. I didn't put the guy in the cockpit. I didn't create this situation. Just like everybody else, I'm a victim of it. I'm just responding to it in my way. Now, we can do two things: Yes, you can make me go to the back of the plane; I'm not going to violate regulations, whatever those might be. But if that hijacker comes out of the cockpit, I would have to stand in the aisle back there with a long lens. But if you just let me stay here in first class and shoot with a wide-angle lens, he'll never know. And the thing is, at least *I* will be the first thing between him and the passengers."

Again, the *gap!* Coffee-tea-or-milk, yes – but a crisis? Or an unpredictable element, like a photographer who won't stay in his seat? And the newspapers reported afterwards the stewardesses were just great (" . . .served drinks calmly . . .") and the stewardesses said back to the papers, "The passengers were great." Well, the fact of the matter is, the passengers were *not* great. Heart trouble. Babies. Drunk. And if that guy had come out of there and started shooting, those girls would have done what everybody else would – started screaming and yelling and ducking. It would have been slaughter, and we would have had to accept our fate because the crew had conditioned the passengers to stoically sit there. No, you wouldn't want to get shot. On the other hand, you wouldn't want to sit there doing the guy's every bidding. I mean, who wants to go on living that badly?

The idea is, the precedent is, the protocol is: "Well, don't trigger him." *Well, what if he triggers himself?* Well, then you get a letter of apology. TWA sent everybody a form letter a couple of weeks later, apologizing for our having been hijacked.

I think the least the crew could have done would have been to put all the women and children in the back. And if any men wanted to volunteer – maybe this sounds kind of Errol Flynnish, but – they could have sat nearest the cockpit, then jumped the guy. It's not a *great* plan. But it's better than no plan at all. Later I mentioned that maybe, only maybe, the pilots should carry guns. I was told: "Yeah, and put a hole in the fuselage!" Yeah, true, but then there's this: What's the difference whether he does it or the hijacker does it? With two dead pilots, all kinds of alternatives have evaporated. (As it turned out, later there was a gun battle and one of the pilots did get shot in the stomach. "Tell him for me," Richard Nixon told his nurse by telephone, "he is a national hero.") They're the only ones who can fly the plane. And when that baby starts to go down, it's going to go *straight* down. And don't think pilots *don't* get shot and stabbed. In 1964 the last that was heard from a Pacific Airlines pilot was the radio message, "My, God, I've been shot! I've been shot!" Gunman, pilot and passengers, kids, too – 43 dead found in the wreckage.

And then there's this other airline ad that says something about "our company gives you a stewardess all to yourself." Right. I had one to myself – I couldn't get her off my back. This one kept trying to block my camera view with her body. Then another one came up and said, "Look, why don't you put those cameras away? Haven't you had enough pictures?"

I looked up and said, "No, I haven't."

And to that she replied she was going to take me to the back of the plane and strap me in my seat. I said, "Honey, you couldn't handle me in the back seat at a dollar drive-in." No, I admit I wasn't making myself Mr. Popularity, Mr. Pleasant Personality. I *had* to get crude with her – they were putting pressure on me! And then one of these smashed businessmen came up and said to her, "I'll take care of this." And to me: "Listen, you. There are four of us up here, and *we* can handle you!" I said, "Four ain't enough, buddy." Now, this is really very funny – me trying to be all *machismo* – because I don't know what I thought I could ever pull off. Me, 150 pounds of shortstuff photographer. Then the guy started to grapple my cameras away from me, and I told him he was going to have to kill me. Well, there are things I'm afraid of. But one of them is not a middle-aged drunk businessman, when you're in a jet airplane that could zero down on the ground any minute. Ah, everybody was goosey. We'd been flying around over the United States for nearly eight hours now, hadn't eaten. The thing is, in a situation like that, you couldn't *reason* if you wanted something. As I obviously wanted my picture. And my reasoning powers weren't getting any sharper; I'd been holding out the whole time against people saying, "You're endangering our lives," and trying to weigh that . . . and being hungry and shaky myself.

Watching this little melodrama be-

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tween the stewardesses and businessmen and me, the other passengers seemed to be distracted from their anxiety.

It was *all* right out of a movie script. It's amazing how accurately corny movie scripts follow common crises. During the tension, people were exchanging names, while if they'd been on an elevator together, they wouldn't have let a single eyeball stray sideways. On that hijacking, it seemed to me to be the feeling that must have prevailed in that New York blackout. And, at one point, people started pulling together. I guess it's what Americans have inside – to do what they have to. But, you know, the people who had the most to lose and to protect were the bravest. Mrs. Babcock with her millions and her heart condition read a book during the whole hijacking. The Howells with their two kids were tremendous. While other people were crawling the walls, and instead of being worried about a guy with a gun stepping out of the cockpit to jeopardize them, were getting hostile with the guy with the camera. I couldn't get over the irony of it.

I tried again to explain to the stewardess my plan for a picture, so that maybe we could work something out together. And she listened, but she didn't really listen. So finally I thought, rather than create an incident and threaten my chances, I'll move back to coach class. I said, "All right, I'll move. But if anybody stands out in the aisle in front of me, I'll have to make myself more obvious. I'm much subtler if you leave me up front." The stewardess said, "Yeah, well, I know you! If he comes out of that cockpit, you'll jump right out in front of him with that camera!" When I went back to coach and began to shoot again, this one couple near me got up and moved to another seat. The husband said, "He could come out of there and aim for you and get one of us!" This same guy later got *very* bombed, and I saw him when the reporters got him in front of the television cameras. He said, "Yes, it was all quite a scarey situation. We were all very, very scared and comprehensive [sic] about what was going to happen to us."

Suddenly Mr. Howell said, "We're moving south." He had been watching the light change on each side of the fuselage. But what was actually happening was that we were circling.

There was this girl. I had seen her having one of these intimate trans-aisle raps with the man across the way – one of these romances-born-in-crisis things. This same girl moved over and asked me why I was going to such lengths to fend off the crew and businessmen and things, causing such a hassle about getting a picture. I said, "Well, for me it's a great opportunity. It doesn't matter how *bad* these pictures may be, they're the only ones ever taken aboard a hijacked airliner. I could make *Life* magazine!" (And the light was lousy – clouds, rocky weather – I was trying to focus between bumps).

"But why are you so insistent about it?" she said.

And I said, "Well, it's just my thing. Why do people paint? As long as I'm going to try and be a photographer I can, at this moment, do nothing else but what I'm doing here on this plane right now. Even if I don't get a picture of the hijacker, if I get off this airplane without doing the very best I can, I'm in the wrong business. How could I call myself a photographer? I'd die of remorse. If you're wondering about any moral decisions I'm making about how far will I go to achieve my personal ends at the risk of endangering somebody else's life – I'm trying to take a gamble, safely. I can, maybe, because it's not these peoples' lives I'm thinking about, they might say. Well, hell, it's my life, too! I don't want to live any less than they do. Maybe, yeah, my motivation's a little greater. I don't blame them. I would feel the same way in their shoes."

And this girl was very caught up in what I was saying. And she started to tell me she wanted to be a writer. I said, "Listen. If you really want to be a writer, start writing down everything you can remember about this hijacking! Right now, every single thing you observe and think. And when you get off this plane . . ."

"What makes you think we'll get off?" she said.

I said, "Listen, they're negotiating up in that cabin right now. If he were going to Cuba or had some definite plan, we wouldn't be circling like this. Get all the facts down! And find somebody to help you put it together . . . and you've got yourself a first person account for *Reader's Digest!*"

(I don't think she ever did it, though.) She said confidentially, "You know, I thought you were in cahoots with the hijacker."

I groaned. "Oh, lady! Listen, if I were partners with him, I'd have the guy out here in the good light, waving the gun and jabbing the stews with it. I'd have him put a scowl on his face. Maybe I'd have him wear a black hood. I'd really make it dramatic."

Now, we didn't know it, but the first time we landed at Dulles, another TWA pilot (Billy Williams, who had flown the Los Angeles-to-Rome hijacking of Rafael Minichiello the year before) came aboard with $100,000 in cash and to take over the controls. All that they'd been able to glean from the Washington banks in that short time, I guess. So Barkley, the hijacker, made the plane take off again, and he dumped the money out onto the floor of the cockpit and said, "Somebody can't count." Since he'd asked for 100 mil, not 100 thou. He told them to turn the plane around and go back for the rest of his money.

The second time the plane landed at Dulles in Washington, I looked out the window and saw lined up across the runway all these huge bags filled with something. "Full of bricks." I thought, "to block the plane." It was newspaper, a money decoy. And there was a whole fleet of fire trucks. And, again, a delegation of people watching. We could sense there was going to be some action. Everybody clutched a little bit. We knew this thing was coming to a head. And sometime in there, the FAA or FBI had driven up and shot out the tires of the plane.

This black guy said, "I'm going to kick the door out."

And somebody yelled, "No, don't do that!"

The first guy kicked the door out anyway, and some passengers started

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FOUNDED IN 1815 AMERICA'S FIRST QUARTERLY

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scrambling out over the wings of the jet. But others didn't know whether to go or stay. People were panicky. Mrs. Howell started to leave, and her husband cried, "No! Get back in here!" He didn't know whether or not the hijacker would step out of the cockpit and see everybody leaving and open fire on us. But then Howell pulled the curtain between coach and first class (now empty of businessmen) to hide the fact of the exodus. During this chaos, no stewardess stepped in to quell or organize or instruct. But when Mr. Howell pulled the curtain closed, one stewardess yanked it open again. I think maybe she did this because of . . . regimen. Or maybe she didn't understand Howell's reason. But by the look on the poor girl's face, I think maybe she yanked it open again because of some rule that went *ping!* at the back of her mind: *on the ground the curtain remains open, rain or shine.* Or maybe she thought the hijacker would see it closed and go berserk.

All of a sudden the plane was empty of passengers. Except for me (the press said I "lingered"). I turned around . . . and there the man was standing in the doorway of the cockpit holding his gun. Beautiful. Just beautiful. He was facing me. I was about fifteen feet away. I had a 105-millimeter lens and this high-speed Ektachrome in my Nikon . . . and I just opened the lens wide open – the light was poor, a lot of fog, mist, and it was late in the day, maybe 6:00 – and I could still only shoot at an eighth of a second and I was hand-holding that shutter. I stepped out in the aisle in front of him. Trying to hold the camera as still as I could . . . with my heart beating . . . I was nervous as hell . . . not so much because the guy had a gun but because *here it was, my big moment, (and everything I'd mouthed-off about)* and what if my shutter wasn't working? Or I hadn't registered the film right! The hang-ups that can only happen once in a lifetime! I got six shots. (Associated Press bought one and sent it around the globe; *Life* bought the others and ran them in color.) Every time he'd hear that shutter click, he would give a jerk – almost as if he had a tic. About the second click, he looked at me. He had been trying to keep his attention on the FBI guys around the plane. On the fifth shutter click, he realized I was taking his picture, and he stepped behind the bulkhead. I jumped out farther and took one more picture of him facing me with the gun raised.

I found a chute and jumped in it and landed on the runway, running. And there was a guy with a rifle standing under the plane. Then some policeman grabbed me and said, "Get out of here! Beat it!" I got some pictures of a cluster of passengers crouched under the wings of the jet; there was a gun fight going on in the cockpit by now. At the edge of the runway, other passengers were staggering and falling down in the grass – I thought some were in shock but realized they were so drunk they couldn't walk – people were crying. The authorities on hand didn't seem to know what to do with these 58 men, women, and children crashed around in the grass . . . and I didn't want them to think about me, but I stood up and was shooting like a radar dish, spinning around 180 degrees as fast as I could. And some woman, some passenger, came up and slapped me across the face.

And later this young guy came up – one of those who had been after me back on the plane about endangering his life. He said, "I want to tell you I don't know who you are or what your name is, you hear me? *But I'm going to find out . . .* AND I'M GOING TO GET YOU!" He gave me a big shove. I said, sure, buddy, sure, or something. I was loaded down with these cameras with these telephoto lenses around my neck. I couldn't do anything but act super-cocky with the guy at the moment. I didn't want to act so smart-mouth I started a fight, because anything at that point that attracted attention to me would call attention to the fact I was trying to hide this film all over my body – in my boots, underpants, everywhere. The guy was uptight, had been drinking. I said to him that his stress wasn't my problem. I wanted to jerk my equipment off and let him have it; I wasn't feeling any less uptight than he was! I'd been under pressure all through the flight. I'd boarded the goddamned thing with a hang-over myself; I was as tired and cranky as anybody else. I thought, no, better not. There were police all around. I said to the guy, "Look, come see me when all this is over." I was so worried about getting the film out of the airport. And as a matter of fact, later in the air terminal the FBI isolated us in this room. (Where TWA announced there would be more free booze for everybody – which is the last thing people needed, more booze poured down them after nine hours in the air on an empty stomach!) And these reporters tried to get me. "What do you have in those cameras?" they yelled. I told them: "Some pictures." They said, "What's your *name*?" I yelled, "Roger Buchanan!" And the FBI hustled me away into this room. I said I had to go to the bathroom (I was planning to climb out the window of the head); they wouldn't let me, and I said, "Okay, have it your way, but I can't hold it any longer," so then two FBI agents were sent with me as guards. But the minute we stepped out of the room, a flock of reporters surrounded us, and just kind of spirited me away. (And as soon as I got out of that airport, I shot for the nearest phone booth and called *Life's* Washington bureau and told them I had some color pictures of the $100,000,000 skyjacking. I could hardly say the words.)

But before this, back on the runway, when this mobile lounge came to take us to the terminal, I was running, as the last one to get on. And when I did, this same woman who had slapped me across the face out in the grass came up to me on the mobile lounge and said, "Did you get your picture?" I said yes, and she grabbed me and hugged me and kissed me and said, "Oh, I'm so glad!"

The next day I went back to the airport to pick up my luggage. I tried then to talk to an official about some possible ideas about the next hijacking (for example, all that booze does not always have a calming effect on hijacked passengers – sometimes people who are drunk get more confused, more hysterical), but he said, "I can't talk to you," and I remember as I left seeing the plane with the tires flat, shot out, still sitting out on the runway. □

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The Importance of Marriage

A compendium of how we want it, fear it, endure it, chuck it, love it, despise it, remember it, and laugh at it—as recorded in fictions by

Cynthia Buchanan
Kaywynne Adams
Robert Fox
William Kittredge
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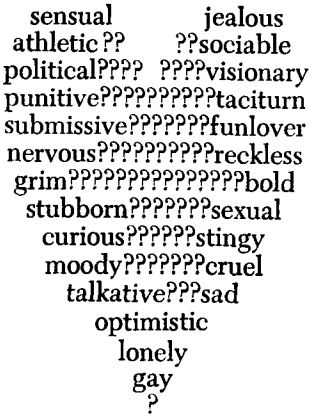

FORTUNE DUNDY

The bizarre progress of a 30-year-old Pilgrim of chastity—from the novel **Maiden,** published by William Morrow and acidly written by

Cynthia Buchanan

She was a virgin and her virginity had burrowed in. So she was a little crazed, a little abstract . . . looked for symbols, answers, messages everywhere. And anxious, she knew such anxiety. It may be that all virgins feel this. Her virginity and her anxiety made her a daydreamer, a planner, a struggler, too gay, too earnest. Would life forget about her? Overlook her? Pass her by? Misdial? Anxiety became a life style.

She lived in an envelope. Sometimes she had trouble noticing things other people did. At other times she saw only too well. One thing she noticed was herself, in light of her own daydreams. These were not airy, sentimental hallucinations, but deep, mournful pageants in her bloodstream. She made a fetish of herself. Her personality grew more baroque, surprised her at every turn. Yet she continued to be her own friend. She consulted herself, admired her own opinions, asked advice of her own wisdom. She had a native integrity, a sense of self, which protected her. But she thought too often to play the *grande dame* on the strength of it. While people went on not noticing her. To the point of overkill. And she continued lusting for their approval, their esteem, their warmth.

At thirty, the idea of sex had such a grip on her that she tried to avoid, totally, thinking about sex. It was a void in her reality and her curiosity minced around it—so high you cannot get over it, so low you cannot get under it. This void obsessed her but she denied her obsession and her curiosity. On the other hand, it seemed she was somehow always hunkering around the spoor of this torrid, nameless chimera. She followed it all in raw movies and magazines . . . in parks, once, and once on a beach she had spied on a couple. But it was still as remote, as irrelevant as Communism or cancer.

She admitted one thing to herself, however: she was looking for a man. She sure was looking for some man. Yet she always looked in private, so secretly that she nearly hid her desperate search from herself altogether.

She worked hard on her image. She was convinced it served her well. Her airs drew on the cinema, on the 1950s, on Loretta Young, on Ann Blyth, on the mannered billowing, too, from fiction—Blanche Dubois, Jean Brodie. She had no idea how false she was.

The extravagant daydreams possessed her, she went soaring off on them. Clothes possessed her. Her wardrobe came from a mail-order catalogue, Frederick's of Hollywood . . . tufts, spangles, synthetic animal skins. Clothes spoke to her; inanimate things often did. She might be walking through a department store. A dress—always one with a rhinestone gewgaw or something that fluttered—would cry out, *Me! Me! Buy me!* She wore the clothes, thinking herself

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distinct and magic. Meanwhile, her affectations, her rouged grimaces . . . these were misread by people everywhere. (But when she got to Los Angeles, her peacock behavior and arch clothing helped her fade like a chameleon into the city-scape along Sunset Strip.)

Language haunted her. The advertised word . . . the "you" in advertising, the impossible "you" spoke to her. It was part of the summons, part of the superstition that seduced her daily. Human experience and earthly lessons glanced off her like a defracted ray. Yet inanimate objects held secrets. In an employment office a year ago, an ad, "California," had been part of the summons. There was superstition in everything.

It was all there, the truth. It was there in the hints about charm, from booklets. (One of the maxims: *Be Yourself!* Then she found she was often punished for this.) In the raw belief . . . the voodoo of her personality.

She moved perpetually in this gossamer sac of musing and advertising. She was waiting for the summons, the tap on the shoulder, the visitation, the different drums. When people spoke to her, she listened for all these, straining for the drums. The speaker might be part of the design watching her, approving, about to approve . . . .

A man, impossibly smitten, an individual so love-sick he can scarcely walk, stumbles toward her. His arms are outstretched. In his hands, an amphora; in this vase is love. He says: Fortune Dundy, where have you been all my life? He has come to salvage and endorse her. Everyone always knew she had it in her; what she called "a certain subterranean something." She had nothing upon which she based all this except autosuggestion.

The gleam of the summons was all around her. In the disclosures of daydreams. In the stares of strangers . . . all potential truthmongers. Hope lay heavily within her, corroding. Then it would give way and doubt came around. And again, hoping. Such a pinwheel of alternating hope and doubt kept her slightly beyond presence of mind. It made her happy and addled in the daytime hours. She was waiting. The intensity of this was awful. The weight of her atrophying sensuality grew. In the dark in her bed she tussled with faith and desperation. She remembered how she was then. And her maidenhood was seen floating like a kite high above a topography that seemed real, that seemed important to other people. She knew she was . . . gauche, denied it, contended with it. And lying there awake in bed, the pleasant muddle of daytime hours would then leave her.

Jobs! The past! Helter-skelter stints that left her panting like a rabbit. Dreaming and waiting for buses, watching, forgetting . . . Finesse in the world of business: this was one of her ideas. To be a crackerjack, glib sort of person. With sparkle. Sparkle was marketable. Employers knew this! But a person had to wait and watch and, most of all, improve. She studied the hidden secrets in the backs of magazines, panting over the promises. And always she sensed the love-struck man. He read over her shoulder. He neither breathed nor moved; he just skimmed the print.

As for this smitten man . . . she would not accept just any. Was this America? Does a person settle for second best? Just any would not do. For one thing: no Adam's apple, nobody with one of those.

Sometimes the stricken man grabbed her into a corner, into the gloamings of the potted palms. This is where you stop dancing, lady, he says. You have got that certain subterranean. I have got plans to listen to every word you say. Not because you have got a lot to say. But because I like the way you say it, dammit. And also I would like to tell you at this time that I will put my arms around you at random. And if there is a thunderstorm outside at night, we will work that out too. Everything is going to be A-O.K. One more question: Tell me . . . where have you been all my life?

Her experience with men was limited. Their interest in her amounted to very little. Or so things had proved themselves. There lay the problem.

True enough, one or two scrubby boyfriends had reared their heads a long time ago. But she was not a woman, one of those who always have someone, some parasite or some goon who needs her. She was a woman who seemed as if she had somebody . . . he waited for her out back at the end of a working day. She appeared that way. But, actually, she had no one. And having no one at all made it harder and harder, as time went on, to have anyone at all.

She would not admit she was alone. She did not realize or articulate her solitariness. But the opaque fact of it fed upon her. For a long time she pretended men were unimportant. Then finally she admitted their consequence; this idea, too, was still obscure. Ultimately: men were the other half of existence. No . . . they were all of it. For without a man a person had no measure—how could she weigh or define herself? She might wander forever, wondering to what extent she filled out her outlines.

She struggled to ignore all this. But sometimes her awareness of men hung around her in a mist. In the presence of a certain kind of man, she reduced herself to her silhouette. She laughed and gasped and blurred—what an explosion! And in time the men—the scrubby boyfriends, too—retreated. They went to a calmer corner of the universe. That the men retreated she could not avoid knowing. But she did not see the reasons for it. And she made things worse. And knowing but not knowing undermined them still more.

What sort was she? She knew exactly who she was. It only remained to tell the world. "Bert"—Bert Parks of the Misses America, "Bert" the emcee—was a device of hers. He knew who she was. He lurked in her vapors. "Bert" stood for any emcee, any interrogator, any reporter, any judge or juryman, any person or thing whose sole interest was her. Whose sole purpose was to examine her, discover her, present her, and venerate her. "Bert" meant the way things should be. "Bert" was the voice of her playful, high-strung narcissism.

She fought often but not openly with "Bert." He came

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into her brain at times of stress . . . but, evilly, he came to stir up a vision even in her idleness. "Bert" was one voice and all of them . . . a thousand messages, reminders, chimeras, critics, and promises. And he had lived in her brain such a long time now. He was company, bitter and loving. His presence was like a persona. "Bert" was her different drummer. He pummeled her spirit without rationale. He took forms . . . inhabited her, incubus, succubus . . . she was always being interviewed or questioned or complimented and then left to doubt the praise. Examined . . . sometimes it was a courtroom. Other times in a contest, a review, or on television or in a movie. Bert, all Berts, were only too aware of her exalted place, her focus in the public eye.

So she waited for courtly love. An awful, abstract, improbable lover! Someone on whom she might test her disdain.

The atrophying sex . . . the fantasies—it had all become almost perverse. She was like a drugged woman. And she went on carrying it . . . this calcifying fetus, the burden of her solid maidenhead.

TO ALL MY FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES AND THEIR KINDRED SORROWS AND EVERYONE ELSE WHO HELPED MAKE ALL THIS POSSIBLE:

Good evening. Good evening to you all, she says.

He requests she speak into the microphone. The "mike." He leans with her, says, "And who have we got with us tonight but a thirty-year-old bundle of sparkle—Fortune Dundy! Tell the folks out there . . ."

ATTRACTIVE PERSON WITH SPARKLE: The first thing I did, Bert? I put a higher type pronunciation on my first name. You have got to keep an eye on the last "e" in my Christian name.

HE: Fortune?

ATTR. PRSN. W/SPRKLE.: No. Fortunée. Rhymes with have-your-say.

HE: Why . . . Fortunée . . . say, that is French!

ATTR. PRSN. W/SPRKLE.: Yes, Bert, I am afraid it is!

HE: Sing it on out now, Fortunée Dundy!

ATT. PRSN. W/SPRKLE.: Being new to California myself . . . and by the way, Bert, they surely did "break the mold," like they say when they made this Golden State! . . . in the coffee shop at Hollywood and Vine, around in there. He was wearing a pair of bright and very tight pants. Bleached blond streaks run through his hair and he is a coiffure artist, he tells me, in the Eleganza Salon. Well, I will not "bluff" with you, yes, I did take to him. Then he walked, dancing kind of, over to the cigarette machine for a package of Virginia Slims. He was thin as a little tree snake. The way he walked to the cigarettes, by that time I was thinking: you are nobody's fool. Meaning me . . . I am nobody's, you have got to get up pretty early in the morning to . . . and then he walked on out of the coffee shop. Left me spinning on my stool. And him not fish, not fowl! Rude? Rude, you say? Mister, you do not know!

HE: Sorry to hear this . . . Would you move a bit closer, just a millimeter, thank you, Fortunée. You know, you look "like a million dollars" in mauve! You . . . that color every day of the year!

ATTR. PRSN. IN MAUVE: I would just like to tell our crowd here tonight I am not a person that gets "down in the mouth" easily.

HE: No, sir!

ATTR. PRSN. IN MAUVE: Clear what I needed. Sunshine, suntan. I told myself, miss, what you need is one of those brown-as-a-berry suntans, one of those California berry-brown suntans. You might think I am just a . . . but I keep my eyes open, you can bank your money on these two baby blues being open. To the Pacific . . . and I crossed the highway, almost did *not* cross, with it burning into my feet and the cars, they do not care if you are on your way to the beach or if you have got to wait with your feet on fire and the first sand of the beach is no different, but mostly those cars did not slow down or give an inch. Broken glass, parked cars, a snack stand—and there it is! As far as a person's eye can see: bodies stretched and flat and browner than syrup. Bodies everywhere . . . collapsed there like string puppets, oiling themselves and also their neighbors' backs. And then, of course, you have got your typical teen-age girls that are like women but you know they are younger. Just a word here, Bert, about lifeguarding in California: they sit up there perching, these men, these lifeguards, wearing their sunglasses in a way that *does* make them look like they could save your life better. The only way you could ever get these lifeguards to look down from their tower is to drown. That is an old, old joke we women know. Then I walked on through these shining puppet bodies in the sun. I excused myself. You might think I do not know . . . "Beg pardon," I kept saying. I was wearing this swimsuit you see here, mauve. No, true, it is not like their suits. Mine has got its own personality and individuality. See this little skirtlet here around the bottom? This skirtlet gives it . . . "sass" and individuality. I could not take a solitary step, no, I was squishing suntan oil out of somebody's tube . . . have you ever been to Santa Monica Beach on a summer day? . . . or spraying sand in somebody's chiliburger. Then . . . found . . . this young middle-aged person on his back. Pestering a little Zenith radio, its dial. Next to . . . staked out my towel. He said exactly nothing to me at that time. I sat down on my towel . . . I also said nothing . . . could almost hear the sun, it was that hot. He . . . next door rummaging in his beach bag, pestering the Zenith. I sat up. I looked out at the water . . . like this. Maybe he would wonder, beg pardon, but who is that mystery woman fixing her bead so deep. He said exactly nothing. I ran my fingers through my hair, like this . . . aaaaaah, feels good! This wind! This beach, this sun! But he, at that time, said zero. Then I looked . . . at him. He had this wristwatch tattooed on his wrist. A joke! Do you believe me? It is true! So for a joke—and for "an opener," like they say—I lean over and I say in a voice like this: Beg pardon, could you please happen to tell a person

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the time? Him? He lifted up his sunglasses for a minute. I point to the tattoo. He curls up his lip . . . turns up the radio music . . . it was a song I could sing for you . . . is that it? The tune? La la ba ba ba bum bum . . . that it? Thank you! No, Bert, no, I do not do it professionally . . . just in the shower . . . my own pleasure . . . no, I would not want to go pro, thank you for offering . . . and he laid his head back down! Well, Bert, I tried to laugh. But that laugh gurgled and died in my throat. That ever happen to you? Sun went behind a cloud of something . . . folded up his towel and radio, the individual with the joke on his wrist that he did not want the world to laugh about. He goes to leave. He steps over . . . and listen to this . . . my legs. Down he leans, he leans down, his Our Mary medals dangling down. He says to me: "Say, now, proxy-locks, you would not want a lay, would you?" I sit up. I smile. My first inclination—do not laugh at this—to take him to mean . . . Hawaiian lei. But you have got to get up pretty early . . . morning to fool a person such as myself. He left. I was "dying a thousand deaths," like they say. Then, at our end of the beach, only me and . . . this one couple are left. On the beach. Sun's gone. Three people, me and them. They were standing up. The wind was blowing out her hair. It was so long . . . he could wrap his hands in it. And he did. Then he wrapped it . . . just so . . . like this . . . around her neck. Then he wrapped her up in the blanket. And then he wrapped his arms around her. Mister, something was trying to crack. Something in me, something small . . . like a bird's egg. And that voice, goddamn it, beg pardon the French, to the fires of . . . took me out to California in the first place, it started talking again. It talked straight this time. It said, "Fortune Dundy, life is passing you by, Fortune. It is passing you by, sister, faster than a fifty-dollar mare at a Fourth of July match race!" (And, no, I do not feel sorry for my path in life, so you can put that in your pipe.)

*

She went upstairs to her room and read "I Said 'No' a Minute Too Late" from *Modern Love Story* and then all of the *Los Angeles Times.* She tried new makeup tricks and danced with the door of the closet. While she danced, her cheek hugging the wood, she thought of the distant sun trying to come through the city nimbus. The sun landed on houses in bonbon colors, in backyards on broken tricycles and garden tools rusting like junk art in rubber play pools . . . patios . . . pubescent saplings; and always armies of children, little people and their spaniels who choked suburbia . . . plundering the saplings, carrying off their armature of nylon cord and doweling, stripping their branches for play whips, and the bus had passed along a eucalyptus canyon silver and green . . . and sometimes the leaves shifted like a school of fish. Her thoughts were cold in her cheeks. Her song tonight was "Deep Purple." She embarrassed herself singing. But she sang on anyway, sheepish, glazed, performing for herself.

After arrival at the terminal, she had locked herself in a stall in the ladies' room. She had changed from something into something . . . a new pair of mauve pants maybe. She forgot to remove the dangling price tag. She was listening to the first sounds of California: piped-in announcements of buses departing. San Diego, Riverside, Phoenix.

At the Hotel Paris—HOTEL PARIS on the glass door—she danced and read.

Learn Good English! How to Be Popular! Old favorites: Magic No-Strap Hidden-Suspension Plastic Cups to Clamp Underneath Breasts, Cards with Eyebrow-Shaped Cutouts to Trace-on Arches, Wallet-Size Photos, Chihuahuas That Fit into a Teacup . . . she thought, what about an ad like this: Backs of Magazines!

How to Be Popular: she had sent for the booklet, studied it, a long time ago. She practiced the principles of eye-play and those of handshaking . . . difficult as it was to shake one's own hand, it could be done. And topical conversation . . . neatness in dress . . . it all seemed like a blueprint for somebody else's existence. But, anyway, let us keep dancing . . . *"Blue Moon . . . you knew just what I was there for . . ."*

She went prowling into some nearby bars. In the darkness, she sidled up to large-pored men and slipped away again, unannounced. She walked back to the hotel with the name backwards from inside . . . bar smells in her head and handkerchief.

. . . makes a person embarrassed. Like the parties she goes to. She stands there alongside the militia of nuts and mints and napkins . . . guests too coy, too dull, people who

are shells. Are there people who are shells? She stands at the party. And unstrung, truehearted, she mans an alarm bell . . . by sounding the ice in her glass. Nobody at the party seems to know what she is talking about. And they certainly pay no attention to the ice-cube alarm, none at all. Then what exactly did she come for? Young lady, why did you come to this foolish party? She came to find a man. But he is never there. And so all the planning what to wear and the primping make her a fool. Is there anything worse?

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A jackass who came to a party to debase herself in the company of shells?

Yet she keeps on coming to the party. This is what troubles her.

*

Are You Lonely? STOP!!!

You Never Will Be Again!

DATAMATE first and foremost Blah Blah in California We Use the IBM 360 for Our Guaranteed Blah Blah Blah People Are for Loving! Singles Widowed Divorced Blah Blah Blah!

She sent away.

Take a Few Minutes to Read This Message!

Every Word Is Important to YOU!

1. This is NOT a game.
2. If compatible friendship and/or a more meaningful relationship is not your goal, please do not use this questionnaire, as it is designed for all sincere and mature people seeking same.
3. If you are orthodox, devout, or sincere in your religion, please circle your answer of "2" to Question No. 8 on the Personality Answer Sheet.
4. Answer "7" to Question No. 8 greatly broadens the volume of names from which to select your matches.
5. Please DO NOT use anything but numbers in answering the questions—with the exceptions of Questions No. 5, 6, 12, and 72. (We will code these here.)
6. For servicemen *only:* Our IBM cards are limited to 18 characters (including spaces) on the ADDRESS LINE.
7. *Please* notify us immediately when you become involved, engaged, or otherwise committed to what appears to be more than a short-term relationship.
8. Many who have had experiences with Acquaintance-Dating and/or Matrimonial Computing wonder how we can do so much for only forty dollars. The answers are on Page Nine.

To Who It Might Concern at DATAMATE: Your question about Additional Comments in this space is an interesting space to leave because I did want to say at this time about your question No. 72 that is not really your business No. 72 Yes or No Previous Sexual Exp. that do not think because of my answer I have got the Bible in mind I have not the Bible is too bossy in my opinion I am not saying No. 72 is a sin or the Fires of Hell no it is just that my opinion of my thinking I remember Wilma Sloan in my city every place has got a girl like that and even though on the "stage and screen" this year a person can see anywhere anytime people on top of the other person that naked and squirming does not mean "the eye of a gnat" as for naked it these days is "a dime a dozen" just walk down to Spring Street or Main Street at the bookstores and racks and do not think that just because I said that in No. 72 that I do not know "what end is up" Hop McElroy is one person you would be interested about eleven years ago and why is it men kiss and then get busy with you There and There when you only want to think about the kiss is what makes a person feel not lonely in answer to your ad Are You? You are going to say to me men do not bother with those "frills of life" they get to business but the person you DataMate has got in mind for me has got to think frills first business second if you get what I mean I know what I have got in mind and he will know too when he sees me too you will do well to keep that in mind when you are computing

F. Dundy

A brochure arrived in the mail. It was from Dionysus West, Incorporated, founders of DataMate. It was a "singles" club for people over twenty-five. "*. . . Life begins where they leave off! The* Real *Generation Gets It Together, So . . .*"

Now That You've Tried DataMate
(one of our ever-growing subsidiaries)

WHY NOT . . . ?
GO DIONYSUS WEST, YOUNG SWINGLE!*

* You there between the ages of twenty-five and forty!

* You there looking for rollicking, frolicking friendship, dateship, mateship!

!Punch-uate the Story of Your Life!
Year-round Bacchus Bashes! The Fun Scene! The Sun Scene! Parties! Dances! Dinners! Picnics! Celebrations! Clambakes! and Wienie Roasts!

Sea Weekends! Ski Weekends!
Skoal Brothers! Skoal Sisters!

JOIN THE BIGGEST AND BRIGHTEST SINGLES SET IN THE WEST AND FOLLOW THE SUN TO WHERE SWINGER MEETS SWINGER IN THE EYE OF THE

!ACTION!

————Membership includes all the above PLUS:————

1. —Free subscription to our monthly, *The Grapevine.*
2. —Free copy of *The Dionysus Dateline,* the quarterly catalogue of members' names, addresses, phone numbers, occupations, hobbies, pix.
3. —Discounts at the DW Boutique (DW sweatshirts, bumper stickers, tie clasps, blazers, cocktail napkins . . . and a host of other Dionysus West paraphernalia!).
4. —An opportunity to participate in the Dionysus West, Inc., profit-sharing plan.
5. —An opportunity to live in dynamic

VILLA DIONYSUS
"Where the Scene Gets Together"

FOR COMPLETE DIONYZATION, ALL YOU NEED DO IS FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

*

There were photographs of sunning, skiing, joshing people. Hey! Hi! Ho! They hailed the camera . . . a wave, a lifted glass, V-fingers . . . Hey!

Inside the recreation hall notices were tacked on a "Bacchus Bulletin Board" . . . "Baccy sez: For sale Ahmad Jamal albums. Attn: Please all Dionysids to buy raffle tickets win Mustang. Attn: Please while in pool not to leave laundry in washers after they have finished cycle. LOST Doberman Pinscher answers to name of Tulip. NEED TO RENT SCUBA equipment. Fourth of July Bacchus Bash!!! BIG PRIZES! Best Costume Symbolizing America, Bitter Ones,

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Bland Ones. Gayle Richey, where are you? I'm sorry. 1948 Morgan in ace cond., spoke wheels, will sacrif. To Who It Might Concern: Hello I am a new gal in town also new DW member looking for a roommate at Villa Dionysus I am attractive and pleasant and I would like to move in quick. F. Dundy."

A young woman named Beverly Besqueth called. They met at Newberry's lunch counter on a lunch break. Blah blah blah. Beverly was a person who wanted to help herself; she seemed to be a young woman with plans, action, ideas for self-improvement. She met with a "touch session" in East L.A. on Fridays. She talked as if she did not know what she was talking about, however. I said to her, "What do you mean?" and she said, "Oh, you know what I mean." Beverly had been a freshman Homecoming Princess at Orange County Blah Blah Junior College . . . 1959 . . . had there really been a year 1959? It seemed more the title of a book . . . a song . . . a movie. 1959.

Beverly Besqueth was sage, round, looked like someone . . . who? Once she had been an airline hostess. The company went defunct . . . it was a small West Coast airline, losing money, going down, its planes were ghosts now. This was her twelfth year as a divorcée. She had been married at eighteen. "What a bastard. Would you believe I came out of that still punching? Christ-o. And I will tell you. I popped right into junior college though . . . then out six months later. I was a zombie . . . trying to forget him. But now I'm new, clean!" Beverly had met a new man. "And what a honey! Christ-o, wait'll you meet *him*. Now *he* knows how to take care of a little girl! I said to Miss Grumpet, 'We're well, Miss G.' " Beverly Besqueth had female problems . . . a uterus that the boyfriend had named Miss Grumpet . . . monthly blinding pain, fever, vomiting.

Beverly blinked when she did not understand. She had a nickname . . . from college or childhood . . . "Biscuit." She had said, "Biscuit'll do." She had met her new boyfriend at a dance on the Villa Dionysus tennis court. "He's in the ad business." It was a small firm, plucky, coming, her boyfriend was rescuing an account called Pudding Tain. Milo's idea was a tiny logo-nebbish, Li'l P.T. "He's very into this. Li'l P.T. could be a comic strip on each box of the mix! It would work into a whole TV series . . . a 'misadventures' sort of bit. He's still trying to push it through at the clients'. But those dudes don't know their ass from a hole in the ground. I mean, what're you going to do, you know?" She studied her Coca-Cola glass. "He says the reason I have Miss Grumpet and her little gymnastics is my heart's too soft. I kept all my upsets inside, he says, and then Miss Grumpet has to pay the piper, you know?" (Fortune is already half in love with Milo Campbell.) "I have been very hung up over . . . Vivian. My last roommate. Her morals. How are yours, by the way? Vivian played hell on Miss G. Vivian—I mean, you know, my house is not a whorehouse! Christ-o, she can take her heads and her hang-ups and her hung-up boyfriends with her! I told her. I said, I'm not sharing rent on your sloppy . . . let me assure you . . . morals." Biscuit had told Vivian that she, Beverly, was not brought up under Vivian's standards and blah blah blah . . .

The music, the tense, female drone seeping blah blah blah from Biscuit's mouth . . . Fortune nearly missed the story for watching her mouth squirm and flex its story . . . a fascinating mouth, there was utter femaleness in it all. But she did not miss the story, no. It warmed her. It grounded her, welcomed her . . . and the man, this Campbell! Knew about a uterus! She loved Biscuit for being the sort of woman Milo would love; she loved Milo for loving Biscuit. Blah blah blah . . . how nice!

"I mean, she can take her crud and get out, I said. She did. Went to Vegas with her spaced-out drummer. Know what she did when she was dragging her suitcases out the door? She flipped this sign at me: ****. Yeah. That's what sort of a . . . would you believe after that one left it took days to get Miss Grumpet quieted. Emotion or cancer. One or the other."

"Oh my!"

"You're very into belts, aren't you? That's an interesting belt you have on there. Leopard, isn't it?"

"Well, not real leopard," Fortune said. "But it surely looks real, I would say. And versatile! Look. On this underside, this plain color. So I just flip it over . . . flip! . . . like this . . . and with your reversible buckle, then you have got yourself a whole new belt idea according to the outfit and color you are going to choose. I think it has got quite a lot of 'special touch' to it."

"Yes, indeed. Uhm, you don't have any steady boyfriend, do you?" Biscuit's mouth . . . the lips came to rest . . . lay like two nude bodies, languid, awaiting . . . .

Fortune said, "I was going with this one person, Murray Caruthers, a 'top banana' at one of the major firms on the West Coast, Tibshraeny, but you know, I got tired of him. His morals. I did not care too highly for his standards, you see. He was an executive. But do not be fooled."

"Vivian was not my kind of people," Biscuit said.

"I am inclined also to the 'no' side of that description of her you have just described to me about Vivian."

"Well," Biscuit bit down on a mouthful of ice . . . her tongue explored the fragments, "I think there's a slight . . ." Now she was spitting ice back into her glass, ". . . chance you might be my kind of people. And I'm going to tell Milo so. And maybe, just maybe, we three could be right happy in B-12. You and me and Miss G."

"Happy as punch!"

"Do you ever wear it turned over on the other side?"

"Not really. I always tell myself I am going to. But then in the end I generally end up with it turned leopard outwards."

"Well, it's very interesting. I'll bet it looks interesting with the plain color turned outside, too."

"Oh, it does. I just have not got around to it yet."

She always awakened early . . . out of fear lest the day get the drop on her.

Biscuit was still a mound under striped sheets.

Fortune prepared for her debut . . . intricately . . . she studied her body . . . white as cheese.

Sunshine and bodies fanned out around the swimming pool, the bronzing Saturday action. Isolated heads bobbed on the water like heads served on a platter . . . a vast, cool,

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illusive plate. The sight transfixed her for a moment . . . those heads, that water. They ducked and dunked.

She stood at the Coca-Cola machine, faking dimes, doors. And she watched the Dionysids at the pool. They had tattoos, crew cuts, sideburns, toothpicks stuck out of their mouths; and out of their hair, pencils. There were moles . . . scars, other imperfections. But, still, they handled their imperfect bodies with self-confidence. Now they flopped into the pool. Now they surfaced or leaned forward, in their pool chairs. When they leaned forward, the skins of their backs bore the waffle-relief of the chaise longue. The smells . . . chlorine, suntan oil, hair spray . . . some girl squirted her hair with a can of Style. It all meant something. Fortune wore new sunglasses, feline. They were a good, dark mask. The mauve swimsuit had the little flare of pleats.

Impudent, miss, that bit of skirt you have thought to delight us with . . . us around the pool. You seem to be an individual a man cannot keep from sitting up . . . notice of! I like them "willowy" like you. A real individual.

Cleavage? She sucked in her stomach and hunched her shoulders together, and walked out from behind the Coca-Cola machine.

Will you tell the court what the first moment . . . all eyes turned?

She had made it to the chaise longue. Now she lay, eyes closed, slits. She could barely make out the placid rubber rafts. They floated by, these rafts, bearing their limp cargo that drank Bud from pop-top cans. She sat up and squirted herself with suntan lotion. She lay down again quickly and closed her eyes. Her heart felt like a cavalry charge . . . and she began to wonder why it was hell . . . why did human beings show each other their bodies in these rituals by seashores and poolsides? Clothes had been invented for a purpose. Out of kindness, consideration to the human eye of your neighbor. I, Bert, have always hated—yes, H-A-T-E—swimming pools and beaches. The bulges, the bulging crotches of men . . . and no matter how hard they tried, the women and their pubic feathers and the suits chafing, chafing . . . .

Someone dove into the pool. The stray rain landed on her chest. Her dark sunglasses . . . do you think our friend, the ostrich, Miss Dundy, fooled anybody in the sand? . . . did not cover her enough. Verily, verily we say unto you, you are like our friend the ostrich.

A half hour passed.

Behind her eyelids dreams occurred and bright warring pinpoints of color. She strained to be anonymous. She heard things, as if she were blind. A wet towel slopped onto cement. Straps snapped. Chairs scraping. Voices . . . conversations. All around her the Saturday action talked, "shot the bull," and "bitched" and blended, sheathing her in it all.

"Hey, Milner . . . while you're up . . ."

"On the lift at Sun Valley . . . wouldn't throw away that spray can because I kind of like the way those fit your little . . ."

"Yeah. He's really into sleeping a lot."

"Borrows it to vacuum his goddamn car!"

"Some kindergarten-primary job in Lemon Grove . . ."

"So who needs him, I ask you!"

"I wanted them, she didn't . . . two kids don't cramp her style?"

"Oh, he's a very, very together person."

"So I stick it under M instead of Mc and you'd think I'd fucked up his whole filing system . . ."

Beg pardon, miss? There was something about the way you came out from behind that Coca-Cola machine. Your eyelashes dropping down there kind of shy to watch your step and that little sass of a skirt flirting over your . . . "hiney." Do forgive our off-color! Once every six months. We get a little rough and masculine, male and merry when we get relaxed. And if you ask us, Miss Newaroundtown, relax! Move easy! That is our motto. Now that is complete dionyzation.

"Ask her if we can borrow a squirt of her Bain de Soleil. Her . . . her in the purple."

Beg pardon, miss? We have been watching you there for a while.

"Honey? Hey, excuse me, hey . . .?"

Who is that mystery woman over there under the Foster-Grants? Hmmmm. I like them like that . . . you might say I like them skinny even. Hmmm, but how can we get her to take notice of us? I know! You pretend you want to borrow some of her Bain de Soleil!

"Say, hon, excuse me. Could we have a dab of your Bain de Soleil there? Hey . . . lady? Honey?"

She counted to ten and sat up. To pretend she had just awakened from (a bower of) sleep. The man was not that close. But she could smell his man smell . . . his oil, his tobacco, his androgen rising out of his pores.

"Your Bain de Soleil there. Thanks." He squooshed her suntan cream onto his shins. "You're new around here, aren't you? Where you from?"

"Oh . . . hah hah haaargh! 'Out West' . . . 'Up North' . . . 'Down South' . . . 'Back home' . . . Mars—take your pick!" she said.

"Yep," he said.

She introduced herself. Still squooshing, the man shook her hand with his left. He thanked her for the cream. His name was Buzz, no last name. His friend, Ron, used the Bain de Soleil then. "Thanks," Ron said. "This is good stuff. You better be careful there yourself, sweetheart. Your chest is going to peel. Look like a potato chip. Can't get too much the first time."

"Oh, do I know!" Potato chip . . . her chest? "One time I was down here at Playa del Rey beach. There was a person with a wristwatch tattooed on his wrist after I ran into a man in tight pants in Hollywood. Oh, I would say it was a good three, four hours after that. I was planning to get to the beach before the sun went down. And what do you know? It had not gone down far enough but I had my knees burned, 'like potato chips,' like you say. You can never tell what the sun is going to do is my opinion on the subject."

Ron . . . fading, leaving, dimming . . . said, "Yeah, it can really get hot."

She reported to him on the sunburn, her "big burn of 1955." It cut her down with fever. It could have sent her to the hospital. There were sunburns known to do that. She told Ron and Buzz what her burn had looked like . . .

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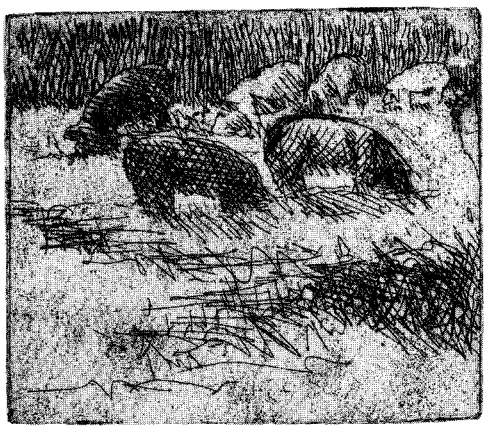

how long it took to heal and then how it looked after it had healed. Ron and Buzz dove into the pool.

She lay back on the chaise longue, quivering from effort.

Much later she rose and walked to the pool's edge. She sat down and dangled her feet in the water.

The tops of her thighs could fool a lot of people. When I am sitting, Bert, my legs look more like they should . . . plumped out this way. Hah, there were so many little ways! So many little ruses! So many things the world never knew about her.

All the women at the pool today did not look like secretaries. Some looked like princesses. Magic . . . with emphatic bodies. They lolled and sunned, undoing their straps. A person could, however, compete with them. If she kept her head about her. And used it.

But one girl—with breasts like impossible ideas—this girl swam with no bathing suit brassiere. She flipped and dove like a porpoise, a mermaid . . . and her breasts flashed in the sun. People watched her calmly. Soon the girl disappeared into an apartment.

What a show-off!

The thing to do, Bert, is be opposite. For example, sitting down now at the edge of the pool—that had been a blue-ribbon idea. A person could play toes with the water. She could turn her face sunward, stretch her throat up, up . . . pale sun goddess in mauve! Where did you come from, pale goddess?

A horsey girl in a black tank suit swooped on the scene, rough as a lifeguard. She began to play in the shallow end, her broad brown shoulders wagging in the water. Ron and Buzz bobbed up next to this girl. The three ducked and splashed, wiping their hands over their streaming faces. The girl did not seem to be wearing a bit of makeup. Oh, she surely did think she was "something on a stick" for sure, that girl; swimming around, having close-ups with the boys . . . no, Big Brown, we do *not* think you are Esther Williams.

An ambush occurred. A thrashing force pulled Fortune into the water by her ankles. She cried out. She clutched in panic at the pool's ledge. Away she went, underwater. She was drowning. She thrashed. From underneath, the water's surface glinted . . . a promised sky. She struggled to surface. She did, churning and gagging. Someone said, "Whoa! Sorry about that. Hold on there! You're okay. Put your feet down."

Ron stood there, waist-deep. He was scooping Kleenex tissues out of the water. He handed her the pulp. "You lose this just now?"

"*NO!!! That is not mine!!!*"

"You sure, honey? Take a look at the top of your swimsuit."

She lost her mind. She tried to hunch down in the water. "*Oh, this water does feel good!!! Oh yes—swim, swim, swim, just like a duck!*"

She dog-paddled frantically toward the steps. But she saw beyond all question of a doubt . . . the rest of her stuffing followed her, disintegrating from the top of her swimsuit like pastel seaweed.

Ron called after her: "Man, I'm sorry. Didn't mean to be so rough." He waded over to the pool's edge and slopped a handful of Kleenex pulp onto the tile.

It was like a murder, irretractable. It lay locked in despair's embrace . . . a memory cloud.

She is thinking all this but says nothing.

(Mrs. Shortt shuffles around her, sucking Vicks drops. She steps up, pins here, tucks there.) The costume is too large. But it is a good one. She is going as Uncle Sam—striped pants, silver lamé coattails, stylized stovepipe hat encrusted in silver glitter.

The waistband is too big. So is the crotch. Mrs. Shortt bastes and Fortune stands daydreaming.

When asked to dance, Bert, a person can do one of two things: smile, rise without a word, put your hand out and go on with him to the dance floor. Or you begin the conversation before arriving on the floor.

And from the wings: Who . . . is she? The one in silver? Blah blah whisper whisper pssss pssss.

Who am I? she says to the stag who cut in on her partner. Some call me . . . Fortunée.

She got on the bus. People stared at her. She paid no attention. "*. . .stand beside her and guide her to the land with the light from above,*" she sang quietly. Somehow—it was annoying the way crazy things happened when you were all dressed up—her unnaturally tall hat grazed the overhead bar. Glitter rained down on the Naugahyde bus seat and the patent leather purse of some woman. In small raindrop sounds.

The lady said, "Oh-oh!"

"Do you know who I am?" Fortune said. The lady's dress, polka dots, bothered her eyes.

"Uncle Sam?"

"On the nose!"

At Villa Dionysus she said to Biscuit and her boyfriend: "Do you think they'll like it?"

"Yes, it's very convincing," they answered.

"Yes, that is my opinion on it, too." She curled her eyelashes and watched Campbell through the eyelash curler. "The fellow at the West Coast Costumery told me all I have got to do is point my finger at any draft-age males at the party and say, 'I want you!' "

"Right on," Campbell said, "you'll be stampeded."

The Villa courtyard was splendid. Red-white-and-blue

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bunting hung everywhere . . . rails, buffet tables lined with lights.

Fortune sat with Biscuit and a brace of Dionysids . . . Corki, Laura, G.P., Harry, etc. Nowhere could she see the evil Ron.

Girls in bikinis sat on some men's laps. Other men snapped wet towels at the passing, jouncing buttocks of other girls. Someone unfurled a woman in an American flag . . . into the pool. The water was a mad froth of people and battles. There were strobe lights on the balcony, grinding out color . . . they painted the pool in colored light, it floated like scarves on the water. Had the girl in the flag been naked? Yes . . . but she disappeared. Why is it naked women appear and disappear . . .? Who can say? The strobe light on the water was beautiful, crazy.

Campbell arrived. The man named Harry hissed and laughed, jumping up to ghost-spar with him. They cuffed and sniffed and jabbed at each other. Campbell was wearing the Farmer John bib overalls, the Li'l Abner boots. The people at the table were calling him the Secretary of Agriculture. Someone then said Biscuit was the Farmer's Daughter. "Hi, Daddy! Hi, Daddy!" Biscuit had said. "Let's go swimming, Daddy! Where's your trunks?"

"Hey, come on, Biscuit," someone said. "We know you know where the Secretary of Agriculture last dropped his trunks!"

Biscuit froze. She rose, gave the speaker a look—"to melt stone," Bert—and ran away. Campbell ran after her. Fortune could see them, hear them. They stood together in the door of the recreation hall, forehead to forehead. Biscuit chewed on the corner of her farmer-wife apron. Her face was tragic.

"He was only trying to be funny," Campbell said.

"You know what he was trying to insinuate!" said Biscuit. Then the pile-driving music started. The band called themselves No Return. The catatonic music buried everything. Campbell put his nose to Biscuit's and wiggle-waggled it. Biscuit doubled over. Fortune recognized this—it was the pain movement, Miss Grumpet.

"That's some costume Roomie has, isn't it, Harry?" Biscuit said when they came back.

"Yes," said Harry, rolling up a pack of Lucky Strikes in the sleeve of his T-shirt, "Uncle Sam if I ever saw him." Harry was watching a girl climb out of the pool. She shook like a spaniel and squeezed water out of her wet ropes of hair. She hitched at the straps of her swimsuit and tucked her escaping thighs back up into it. "This your first ordeal, Sam?"

"Yes, it is, Harry. And yourself there?"

"Oh no. I've been around a while."

"And yourself, Harry. What sort of a profession do you do? You must do something that you use your arms and shoulders a lot."

"I'm out at Sears. Photography department."

"Try a Vogue?" The strobe light passed over her. Grains of reflected light from her hat fell upon the wet tile.

"Harry, I told Roomie you'd show her the slides from the April Fool party. Is the slide room locked? Find Tuck. Bye! We're going to dance one quickie and then change into our suits." Biscuit led Campbell out onto the tennis courts. There they jumped and gyrated, simulating the dance steps of other, slightly younger Dionysids with better senses of rhythm.

"Aw, swing it!!!" Fortune shouted to them. She flicked her Vogue, tapped her foot and hummed. "This music has got real zip," she said to Harry, offering him a Vogue again,

"No," he said politely. "No, thank you. I have my brand."

Do not lie to me, Bert! I am not lying, Miss Dundy, our judges *have* been able to come up with a Date for you, I am talking as straightforward as the nose on the back of your hand. A Date coming up at 4:00 this A.M. July Five you have got a D-A-T-E, date! If you are lying to me, Bert, I will kill you.

He had medical-looking hands. She knew it the moment she had laid eyes on them. Hands were one thing she knew.

"I met a dentist. Dr. Samuel Fritchey," she told Biscuit.

"What??? Here? At this party? They invited *him?* They invited Skip Fritchey?"

"No. He was cutting across to his car. He left something in his office. It's downstairs in A Wing."

"Well, Well! Isn't that nice that with all these men at this nice party you stumbled across Skip Fritchey and he stumbled across you? Isn't that nice?"

"Yes, it is nice," said Fortune. To "put it mildly," Bert.

*

She wrote a letter to the lovelorn column of the *Grapevine*, a corner called "Hung-Up" in the weekly flyer-newspaper.

"Dear 'Miss Ima Shoulder' I am a new gal Dionysid and I am wondering advice about the subject of 'crossed wires' when a man says I will meet you by the swimming pool at four A.M. and then he does not this is not a true story in this letter it is just a question I have got about a person I know my sister let us say that had a date and the man said meet me at such and such and then he got 'wires crossed' or he got in a car wreck on these freeways we have got in this state do not get me wrong I love Calif. they surely did 'break the mold' in making it does he really mean I will call you and what you thought he says is I will meet you a long time ago my sister let us say met somebody in checkered pants that said I will call you and she this person was standing near the front door of the Elks Hall Ballroom and looked like 'a million dollars' she wore mauve that was her color and people told her stick with that color and you will go a long way she was twenty-one years old and her girl-friend was dancing the whole night with a poor person that had an Adam's apple the size of your fist that is too bad men should get operated on and a hand-tooled belt with his name on it Gideon and the man the person in mauve picked out though he had a sly way I liked he just stood there not looking at me just smoking and polishing his toe it was an alligator shoe up against his pants legs I have always had an eye for those people of this world that are something more than just your everyday of the mill person she asked the man did he beg pardon have the time of day would you be so kind to tell a young lady it on your wrist-

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watch and he said he did not wear one oh beg pardon she said back to him at that time he did not say another word the next ten minutes she said okay excuse me and she went to the powder room not to blot her lipstick on the walls the way the trashy women do and she fixed her corsage she always wore one fresh on her wrist and to check her make-up and give him outside time to think her over later she went and stood by him and she sang along with the band she can really sing it was a 'cat' song like they said in those days by Bill Haley and the Comets if you remember them they are not like the music of today but she sure could sing and so she sang along about thirteen women and Bill the only man in town she smoked too that is always a good thing to do if he is smoking then he lights yours that is a tip I can pass on to you Miss Shoulder for our readers the mauve gown was chiffon from a wedding the fall before there was a punch stain on the skirt but if a person is clever she hides the stain in the folds if she keeps swishing around I will call you and you and me will go out tomorrow he said that do not think Miss Shoulder he did not have class because of his grammar faults we all in this world are not perfect not even you then in the car out in the parking lot of that old Elks Hall a wonderful place that is standing no more but I 'remember it well' like they say he wanted to kiss and his lips went clamp over my mouth a snail on a fish bowl meanwhile there he went that was a 'mean disappointment' he was wanting to touch my 'privates' just my chest to 'pet' is the best word and he smashed my corsage I was sad and I am sorry he did do that What about going back inside my sister says then but checker britches says I do not know how to dance that is okay I will show you she says and she did one-two push my rib now turn is the easiest way to show a beginner and she sure could dance she is known for her dancing and could go professional ask anybody that sees her I will call you was what the man said then okay all the next day Sunday she goes to wait at her girlfriend's house the one with the telephone because Sook's mother and her sister 'with child' and the sister's three children all went to Word of Light in the morning and to family for supper and they were gone and she my friend that had the telephone that had the date with the alligator shoes person waits at the telephone she did her hair and her nails and finally took her bath even though she left the bathroom door open to hear better it sounded like ringing but it never was and she did not splash or make noise and she knew that a watched pot never boils so she promised no she would not look at that telephone you can jinx things by doing that the day goes by and goes by and she tries not to think but instead she sits in the bedroom on the bed and draws pictures on a brown paper bag one side of the bag she makes a landscape drawing pointed trees with a girl sitting by a river she wears a crown playing a guitar and on the other side of this bag she draws eyebrow shapes some closed with lashes do you know how Sunday sounds so quiet it is you hate it so quiet you think you can hear the leaves outside rusting and rotting on the ground like they are talking to you and the old rainwater in the tire shell in the backyard do not ask me if he called you can guess by now and even the bulbs underground talk it is that quiet do not think there is something wrong with yours truly I do not really hear dead things talk I only was wondering if you could help with the problem of why men say one thing and do another thing.

"The Lady in Lavender."

She stood on the balcony. A listless breeze caught the hem of the peignoir. She had been watching a man on an apartment balcony across the way. Bare-chested, he ate donuts. His eyes were closed. Once in a while he would open his eyes and flick sugar flakes off his chest.

The doorbell brayed suddenly. She flew into the bathroom and tried to glue on her eyelashes. Not knowing who it was but certain it was the dentist. Even now at eleven-thirty Sunday morning. It was Campbell, sluggish and barefoot; he came for the Sunday *Times.*

Biscuit was still sleeping, she told him. No, don't wake her up! he cried; she's tuckered out!

Coffee? Tea? Sanka? Tang? Did he want anything?

"Yeah. You can lay a little coffee on me." He read the *Times,* all over the couch.

Fortune began to brush her hair. She sat at the table and lighted a dead half-smoked Vogue. She went through the classified, whispering aloud to herself. "Now . . . let us see, let us see . . . *Keypunch,* no . . . *PBX,* no . . . ah, here is one *'Attractive . . .'* "

"We didn't know you were job-hunting," Campbell lifted his head.

". . . and *'Discount King needs exp. woman public relations.'* Hmmmm . . . I do not know about . . . 'Discount King?' What sort of place is that? 'Discount King.' That 'discount' part has got a peculiar buzz to it . . . sounds common. And keypunch! Keypunch, they all want keypunch! Ah . . . *'photographer's model'!"*

Biscuit shuffled in, scratching at her shorty pajamas. She and the stuffed elephant fell upon Campbell. Biscuit nuzzled his neck, her eyes closed. He hugged her. He called her his "sleepy-time gal." Biscuit, eyes closed, trancelike, worked her mouth in and out, like a nursing calf. She clucked it wetly once and fell silent again, pretending she was asleep.

Campbell whispered, "What kind of work you looking for?"

Fortune, by this time, was on the balcony. "Beg pardon?" She told him she was not interested in just any sort of "bread-and-butter" position; she wanted something where she could "meet the public on its own terms."

Biscuit leaped up. "Whuh? Where am I? Me dreamum! Oh, Daddy, you're here!" She hugged Campbell. "Me was having ugly dream, Daddy. Me dream her over thereum said she no have got job. But me know that not true because me knowed she knowed how much the rent costs. Plenty. Oh, me so glad it all a dream, Daddy!" She fell back again, pretending to sleep. Then she blinked, "Wake-um-upping," and sat up. "Good morning, everybody. How'd I get in here? Hello, Roomie. And how was your date with Skip Fritchey?"

She lay on the bed, with the classified ads. She could hear them fixing lunch. Whack! went the breadboard. Bang! the cupboard door.

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"You heard her," Campbell said. "Public relations."

"Public relations!" Whack! "Public relations. Oh. Well, more power to them that's got it. More power to her."

"Now, don't get upset, honey, you'll have miss G. . . ."

"What I don't understand is why she doesn't run for Rose Bowl Princess!!! Or the Senate!"

"Now, honey," he said.

"Gimme kiss."

Fortune peeked.

They were just now drawing apart from the kiss. Biscuit stared into Campbell's eyes. She wore a small, occult smile; her eyes were glittering like the taillights of a sports car. Glistening on her bottom lip was a single drop of blood. "*Un-cle,*" she said languidly, staring into his eyes. Out came her cryptic tongue then and, like a reptile's, flicked the blood away.

Campbell turned away.

Fortune pulled back and leaped onto her bed. Then she heard Campbell say for Biscuit not to hit him in the face, Beverly, he did not like it, Biscuit, to be hit in the face.

"Whatsamatta, Daddy? My big Daddy going soft on his little girl?"

"You don't hit a man in the face. Men don't like that. Even in play."

Fortune was breathing as if she would burst. She laid her cheek against the wall. Once again she made her way to the crack at the door . . . and peeped. Campbell stood holding Biscuit's wrists clamped in his hand—he was a big man, it was now apparent—and he raised his other hand as if to strike her. Then Biscuit pretended "uncle." When Campbell released her, she feinted, and with a little capriole, slapped him soundly across the face. Spinning off, she said, "If it's one thing for people to be when they're job-hunting, that thing is realistic." She grabbed the bread knife and hurled it at the bedroom door. "You asleep, Roomie?"

No, a person could not be said to have been *asleep,* exactly. But not exactly *awake,* either. And about that Bread Knife Affair: if people get *too* fancy, the *other* person would have to open her purse. You see, Miss Dundy does happen to carry, Your Honor, a . . . kitchen knife of her own in her purse to sharpen her pencils and when she never knows walking in some parts of this City of Angels when . . . waltz up behind her in the night like happened to that girl found in the garbage cans off Severance Street. Pencils or people in the night—Miss Besqueth should "think twice" about Bread Knives Against Bedroom Doors. Oh, Bert, you "overreact on molehills" sometimes. I was only meaning "a word to the wise" to her. But, yes, and this purse here of mine the court sees before you *is* see-through. I will leave it around B-12 sometime. I will even leave it open sometime . . . "casual." She will see. There will be no need for words. Fortune smoked and fanned. With her Japanese fan, every evening now she sat by the pool. People . . . coming, going. She watched apartment doors. One would open from time to time and chuck another Dionysid. Fortune would count the door and look it up in the *Dateline.* . . . Who lives there? Who was that apartment door all about? A stranger is just a friend she hah-hah had not tracked down in the *Dateline* yet! Maybe with *your* black magic and *my* spell . . . ! But she was waiting for the dentist. His office had been dark for nine days now. She had once said to Biscuit: "Do you think that that dentist got in a car wreck?"

"Who?" Biscuit had been at the closet, doing something to a dress.

"Dr. Fritchey."

"Had an accident? What! Is he all right!!!"

"No. I say, do you suppose he might have had some little car crack-up?"

"When?"

"The other night. That night."

"What night?"

"The Fourth of July celebration."

"Christ-o, what are you talking about?"

"When he did not show. Maybe he was hurt on some freeway and afraid to tell me later."

"Forget it."

"Beg pardon?"

"He just didn't come. Men sometimes don't," Biscuit said.

Men sometimes do not come. That was the same advice "Miss Ima Shoulder" gave back in the *Grapevine.* At the bottom of the column—the others were short, silly letters about arguments with boyfriends—she had made a note: *To "The Lady in Lavender": Your letter was too long to run, although it was quite a work of art. But here's a tip: get hip.* And then the part about men sometimes do not come.

"Oh, yes he does come!" Fortune had said to Biscuit. "Or he has got himself a real reason!"

"Puh-leez duh-rop it. Besides, I forbid you to mention his name in this house. Zip me up, will you? Thank you. Now, to me, a place like, say, Van de Kamp's sounds like lots of fun! And tips galore!"

"Thank you, too, for your interest but I have not got waitress work in mind."

"Work for my woman, toil for my kids, sweat like the devil all the day . . .!" She had gotten a job. She would begin demonstrating cake-decoration guns on the mall at a shopping center in Westwood. They would pay her an hourly wage. She would earn a commission for every decorating set she sold. She told Biscuit and Campbell that if the world was not careful cake decorating as art would soon disappear. "Have you ever seen these one-squirt throw-away cartridges the supermarkets are trying to push off on the public? Those serve-ur-self racks? Why, they no more give a person a chance to make a cake a refined thing . . . than if you told a doctor, 'Doctor do this heart transplant with these hedge clippers.' But now, you take a look at us!"

She demonstrated on the underside of an enamel dishpan. "On the job, I use real cakes and demonstrate the sidelights on this pan, my 'demonstrating pan.' Then I can erase if I want to. See here—swirling motion with the wrist gives you your rose! An up-and-down rhythm and you have got your zigzag . . . and stop it a second and there you have got a carnation! Fancilize the edge here with your loop-the-loop. And for a change of tune . . . oh-oh . . . well, every so often you have got yourself a dot-dot-dash (we could call that your 'Morse code trim,' could we not? Hah hah hah hah!) . . . and you are on your way with Deca-

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Cake! How do we make rosebuds? you ask. I will show you. We make rosebuds with a . . . one little base like that . . . smaller squish just so . . . end up in your little bud! Looks like she is about to open, does she not? Let us say you are in the market to use another color, you just slip your nozzle onto your cloth frosting gun here, squeeze like this here, gentle, gentle with the palm of the hand—the secret of success is in the palm pressure—and there you go, simple as taking pie from a baby. Now: you ask me, what about stars, Miss Dundy? Why, you just slip on your Star Nozzle! Watch close. And has Deca-Cake got other nozzles? We surely do. Take a look for yourself, do not take my word . . . not one or two or three but four different nozzles. Giving you your various frosting flows and shapes. Now: you say to me, 'Miss Dundy, all this is real "well and good," like they say, and I even think I could decorate a little cake at home, Miss Dundy, but would I be wrong, Miss Dundy, in trying, say, a *wedding cake?*' No friend, you would not. I am mistaken or you are all saying to yourself right now, 'But how?' How? I am going to show you. For only a few little round and rolling copper centavos more, we will throw in for you our special Wedding Nozzle.

"There she is! Makes not one, not two, but three different designs for that very special event when those bells are going up in that steeple. You have got your . . . now watch close here . . . your Nuptial Rosette. That is with the nozzle straight up and down. And then you have got your formal ivy leaf. And we do hope you will be using white frosting. And then when you slant your nozzle like this, you have got what I like to call your Bridal Bordertrim. Now, a lady came in here the other day saying that is all 'well and good' if you have got the money. But hold your team, I told her, hold on while I tell you the price. This little extra Deca-Cake Wedding Nozzle is only—hold onto your hats—three quarters, shiny or dull, of an American dollar, plus four coppers. Yes, seventy-nine cents and we will throw in the Wedding Nozzle along with the rest! Well . . . I am going to tell you what that Doubting Thomasina did: she bought three Deca-Cake sets, three regular sets *plus* three Wedding Nozzles!"

Biscuit and Campbell walked into B-12 in the middle of the afternoon and found her on the balcony.

"Roomie, love!" cried Biscuit. "Home early? Thought you'd be at work." Campbell was carrying a small, rickety table. He set it down and blew some dust off it.

"No," Fortune said. She did not turn from the balcony, but continued staring out toward the freeway, turning the cigarette between her thumb and forefinger slowly. "No."

"Sick?" Biscuit said.

"Sick?" Now she turned her head and greeted them both solemnly and commented on their Salvation Army purchases. She turned back to gaze from the balcony again. "Yes, a person might say she is sick. Sick of people that will not leave a person to work up to their full talent."

"Oh, Christ-o, what is it now? You tell me, Daddy."

Fortune said then that if the world was not careful, real cake decorating was going to disappear. "When a person thinks about the binds they are putting on the profession."

"What, Fortunée, what, what?" Biscuit said.

"I was given a choice. I made it. And I told them why and they can put that in their pipe. My, look at that sky . . . those are some jet planes 'to remember.' "

A California health law said if you work around food, you must not have hair touching the collar; short hair . . . or you must wear a hairnet. "Cut this? I told my employer I happen to be an individual that's hair, we all remember Sampson, is her glory. And talking about hairnets, I told him that is for fry cooks and carhops. How they hold the opinion that a person can meet the public on her own terms and its terms with all the hobbles they put I would be interested if they could tell me about the subject."

She did not tell them about the worst of the end of Deca-Cake. She would miss him. He wore an initialed handkerchief in his pocket when he came every morning to set up the demonstration booth for her. (How she pretended to struggle with those slats, fight that booth! Here, let me do that, he said.) He tallied the receipts from the day before. He joked, winked, and with a last brow-wrinkling squint at the booth, disappeared into the maze of stores. At evening he came like the evening sun and dismantled the booth. They had discussed lots of things while they were setting up together and dismantling . . . had talked about things Fortune read in the newspaper. She told him she read them every day, she spoke of the bit notices about murders in other lands, unimportant murders, important only to the people murdered. The man had the same breathless immediacy . . . the same magic Robert Preston had in *The Music Man.* His whole style spoke of a wonderful life, a life within one's grasp . . . just around the corner, up that street lined with Ferris wheels and candy-apple concessionaires. That carny charm of his, those stray winks . . . the boss reminded her of a friend of her brother's a long time ago, Hop McElroy. This brother's friend had almost brought her the little orchid corsage . . . and had those been balloons scudding across the gymnasium ceiling? Or had they been testicles . . . airborne? Brightly colored, incandescent, helium-filled testicles . . . rising, rising, seeking the stratosphere? She had seen the corsage once in a hotel florist's window. The brother's friend had not bought the corsage, however. It was a wrist arrangement of seven speckled sister orchids, small, delicate . . . so translucent and vital, were those petals or was it skin? Human skin that breathed and waited, giving off light? These orchids of her dreams did seem practically human to her. A chorus of little friends. They rode her wrist while she danced the night away. She would take the orchids, siblings, and put them in the icebox. She would look at them every day. But one day, some day, because they were human . . . the brutal air and the harsh eyes of people would turn them brown. But with great grace they would turn that way. And she, Fortune, would know their hour had come. She would remove them from the icebox. And she would make them eternal. Into their original cellophane sack they would go. She pinched shut the bag. She locked it forever with the long, strong florist's pin; the pin had a large pearl-droplet head. Into the old telephone book the shrouded orchids would go. On top went canned foods. She flattened and canonized the wrist corsage of seven friendly orchids.

It seemed as if he, the brother's friend, had brought her

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the orchids, when all was said and done. She had thought about them so long it almost seemed her one wrist was heavy with them. When she passed florists' windows she compared those bigger, brasher orchids in the window with the ones in her imagination. Years after, she began going to the Elks Hall dances. She began then to buy herself Saturday night corsages. But she never found the little orchids the brother's friend never brought her. So she could not bear to buy orchids at all. She wore carnations every Saturday night. These were not worth pressing.

Fortune cut her hair off. She went back to reclaim the job. The cake-decorating outfit, she was told, had folded up, moved on. Summer was over; these people go South for Christmas, go to San Diego.

Campbell was looking at a repair bill for the Morgan. He had paid ninety dollars to find out it had been his ski boots lying on a wire.

Biscuit had sent Fortune and him to the El Rancho. Balancing a bag of groceries, Fortune told him she had been hired six hours ago by one of the major firms on the West Coast.

Campbell stopped, shifted his groceries. "Just what kind of a job?"

"It is in the physical-fitness field."

Why was he taking his tie off? He was always taking something off when he talked to a person and rolling it up in a tight snail and setting it on the hood of the car. "Public relations," she said.

"Public relations. I see. In what capacity?"

"Telephone capability."

"I see."

"It is making special offers to people so they will sign up at Gym 'n Trim. That is the name of my company. It is one of the major . . ."

"Interesting you should bring this up, Fortunée. Why, only last night Biscuit and I thought of a job that pays a good wage and you wouldn't have to be sitting all day dialing numbers, soliciting people whose faces you don't even see, Fortunée."

"You do not either see the peoples' faces you want to buy your pudding either."

"Watch it! That's got nothing to do with it! And don't go around passing judgment on my job! Advertising is something you don't know one goddamn thing about!"

"And, anyway, it does not bother me." She bumped her purse against her thighs. "I do not care if I see my clients' faces. It makes me the *misterioso* behind the voice."

"Would you cut this '*misterioso*' crap! What're you laying on us this *misterioso* crap when we're trying to help you cut the crap!"

Fortune drew away. "Beg pardon? Yes . . . why, yes, Mr. Pudding."

Biscuit's boyfriend slowly pulled off one glove. "Look, Champ," he said gently, "what Biscuit and I have in mind is just that: saleswork!" He smiled and biffed her on the chin with a flopping glove.

"What do you want me to do? Bite my girlfriend on the lip until the blood comes out like bright paint on the lip?" she said.

"Down at Jiffy Center! Take your pick! Over sixty stores and shops! They need talent down there . . . like you! Somebody down there is looking for somebody with 'that certain subterranean something!' Take Zeigler's, for example."

"Counter work?" She drew away . . . felt the cool hard cans of frozen orange juice pressing into her stomach . . . cold and sensual. "Counter work? What kind of work do you call that? Those girls stand around hitched-up half asleep waiting for some customer to trip over their cash register! How much 'talent,' like you say, has a person got to have to do that?"

"I understand their standards are quite high down there at Jiffy Center."

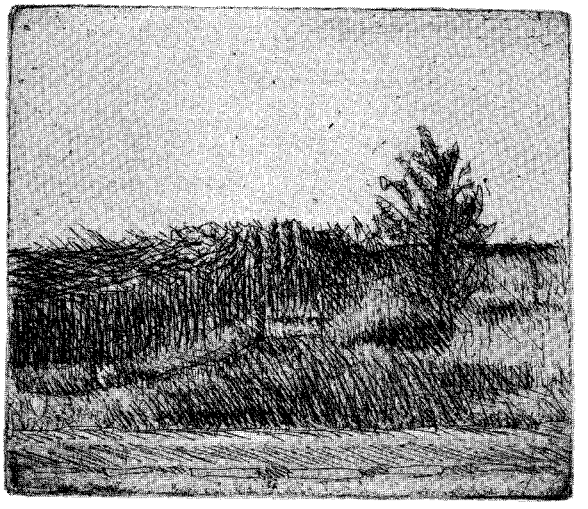
"Could be."

"Or what about Thirty-one Flavors?"

"Oh yes, now there is a real lulu of a place."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, I am not criticizing. 'Far be it from me.' But do you call standing behind a counter like some wooden Indian or making change or giving somebody something they want when they come in to find it in the first place



and sure as not me having to wear one of those tacky uniforms! You really call that the kind of position you can hitch your wagon to a star?"

"If you want to know," Campbell said, "I do. Yes, I do."

She said, "Your star. Not mine, buddy."

Beg *par*don?

You heard me.

Your st . . .! Get that down in the records before . . . ! But . . . wait. What, exactly, would you tell the court at this time, were you intending the meaning of behind that proclamation you said to him at that time when you said *Your star. Not mine, buddy?*

I *thought* you would like that, Your Honor.

I did not say I liked it, Miss D. I said what was your opinion behind your meaning.

That I do not like him, the man in question, Miss Besqueth's "constant companion," talking cock of the walk to

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a person! Our audience knows there comes a day that that person, yes, true, I had to "gird my loins" to say it. And do not ask me any more questions to this: He had come down upon the head of F. Dundy for the last time. And if you go around "putting out bad karma" in the face of F. Dundy too much, the day will come that she will rise up in the face of that opinion and say to you: *Your star. Not mine, buddy!!!*

Whew. But . . . then why—answer the audience at your own convenience—does your throat feel bitter with that taste of adrenalin when you say it?

Look, do you or do you not want to hear the end?

Bert: (Sigh) Yes, yes, all right, all right. (Sigh)

Person That Rose Up in the Face of M. Campbell: Then M. Campbell threw his special driving gloves into the Morgan car and heaved the groceries away from me and walked on past me through the Villa Dionysus breezeway. And so that is how it went. The only thing I am "Post Office"-ed about is that *I* would have liked to do the Pilate thing he did with the gloves.

"Pudding Tain brings you New Dessert Discovery! Empire Flavors! When at home eat as the Romans would! Colossus Caramel! . . . SPQR Strawberry! . . . Chariot Chocolate! . . . Roman Raspberry! . . . (then *segue* to . . . *Render unto your palate that which Caesar would!* (and *super* of . . .) *Pudding Tain—The Imperial Dessert.* How's that sound, B?"

Fortune untangled the telephone cord from around the stool's leg. She stepped over Campbell, reading his advertising copy on the floor.

Biscuit was also on the floor, cutting, sewing, making pillow covers and drapes and things for Campbell's apartment; they were redecorating it entirely in black and white. Most of the labor took place in B-12, since Milo's place was being repainted and carpeted. "Oh, sweetie, that's really the heaviest thing you've done! 'Empire Flavors!' How you ever think of those things. You genius!"

Fortune dialed and was singing: *"Tweeeeeeeedlee tweeeedlee tweedlee dee! I am as happy as can be! Jimminy crickets, jimminy jax! You make my heart go clickety-clack! Tweedlee tweedlee dee!"* She had played nervous, ferocious, committed Ping-Pong with the man in the "rectum" hall, as he had called it. The man—he never told his name, she never asked it—had smacked his paddle through the air in long, ghostly strokes. The ball chased her, escaped her, flirted with her! That little white Ping-Pong ball had seemed to have its own kinetic *duende.* It came to her all as the sing-along dot in the old movie shorts, follow-the-bouncing-ball. And the moon would always fly down out of the sky to become the bouncing ball.

"Yes, and we are going to send you free, Mrs. Holloway, yes, free! Without any charge to you, no, none, Gym 'n Trim is going to send you our special offer! Beg pardon? Our special diploma, free and good for the first two sessions of our courses at our salon! Now, tell us when we can put you down for an appointment to solve you or your husband's particular figure . . ."

"No problem," the woman said.

"Well, and are you not the lucky citizens! Well, then, say, why not come on down and just get a muscle tone then? That is all you 'perfect figure' types need . . . and now, I know what you are going to say and I will eat my hat if there is any obligation . . ."

The woman hung up. Fortune said, "Some of these old sows do not want to come around at all."

But Biscuit was sanding a chair from the Salvation Army. All the furniture for Campbell's redecoration was to be black. He squatted next to her, sanding. Biscuit's buttocks rolled with the rhythm of her efforts. Fortune watched her shearing the epidermis off the chair, those haunches rolling, rolling like a galleon bearing into the wind, grunting.

". . . California's foremost figure control and body center. And I bet you did not know we have got a couple of stars from the Fox lot that use us. I do not recall their names but take my word for it. We have got the cream de la cream, Miss Fireman, and hold onto your hat now! It is F . . . R . . . E . . . E, that is right, Free . . .!"

She went to the refrigerator and pulled out the vegetable bin. Two oranges furry with mildew rolled down to meet her. She found a box of Quaker Puffed Rice and ate those dry from the box. She lay with the box on her chest, dribbling the cereal "shot from guns" into her mouth. She thought of films on birth; dripping, purple, the newborn was laid on the mother's chest like the box here. The baby's tubes and nodules gleamed with membranes.

Biscuit and Campbell left; she heard the door close. The telephone directory flooshed onto the floor. She lay and thought of the stars and the comets and the machine at the bottom of the sea, that keeps grinding out salt.

Later she got hold of somebody in the *R*'s in East L.A., who said he thought she sounded awfully cute over the telephone.

He promised to buy anything from Gym 'n Trim if only he could meet that voice behind it all. "Sure like the sound of your little voice," he said.

His name was Rusty.

I liked the sound of his voice, too, Bert.

But she was certainly not going to say so. (Rule Number Nix: Do Not Let the Man Blah Blah Blah You Are Interested Too Early. "Keep Him Guessing.")

A Dionysid named Gary Walker was driving to MacArthur Park, was going there in an old surfing woody crammed with people in sweatshirts, workshirts, T-shirts. In the back with the bats and gloves was Donna Williams and her visiting "betrothed," a person of the Hebrew religion. Howard scooted over, making room for Fortune. Donna was singing *". . . buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jacks, I don't care if I never . . . !"*

Howard smiled at Fortune. *". . . if they don't win it's a shame!"* Fortune sang.

"Gymnasium?" I thought you were working for that cake-decorating thing?" Donna said.

". . . so it is one! two! three! and you are out . . . Correction there, Donna: figure-control firm. And, no, I left Deca-Cake behind 'in my dust' some while back . . . *at the old ball ga-aaaaaaaaaaaaaame!"*

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Bliss welled in her. Life was coming to a head this afternoon. Nothing else was necessary but the here, the now! This ship cutting through this sunshine! Skipper Gary, hands on the wheel, big tumor of a ring on his middle finger, ΣAE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY '59, leading the songs! Yes, the only place! Here! The only motto: Hang in There, like they said. Saturday afternoon and everybody's "hang-ups" had been "hung up," Bert. Hung up with the lunch pail or briefcase or whatever at the end of a work-a-Dionysid week . . . freeways . . . pharmacy counter lunches, rut, stress, maybe boredom and pangs of unrequited love, who knew? Out the window! All these now blew away, trailed away, became the wake of the going, gunning *Good Ship Woody* packed with wild-eyed–here we are!–good people over twenty-five but under forty. We sing together! Wow, Bert, we are *heavy! "Salvation Army! Salvation Army! Put a nickel in the drum, save another drunken bum!"*

"Testimony!!"

"All the women shall wear . . . suits of armor!"

"BOOOOOOOOOOO!"

". . . But all the men shall carry can openers!"

"HOOOOOOOOOOOORAY!"

See what I mean, Bert? Ragged but right! Hang-ups? Boo! Down with them! Down with Reagan, Nixon, Agnew, hemorrhoids, yellow teeth, bad English, war, peace, blackheads, pimples, and trusses! Up with us! Yaaaaaaaaay! Up with let it all hang out! No keeping DWers down! We are going to tear the guts clean out of Saturday! Raaaaaaaay! Down with the Over Forty! Hooray! Down with you next door in your Cadillac and cigar and your wife–your wife there with pearl chains hooked to her reading glasses so she can find them without too much trouble, so her own glasses, her own possessions do not run away from her! Up yours, Mr. Cigar and Mrs. Glasses! We will run you and your twenty-five air-conditioned anniversaries right off this boulevard! Raaaay for us! Raaay for the Certain Subteraneans. "I left that Deca-Cake position a while back, I said! I LEFT THAT DECA-CAKE . . . ME, THAT CAKE PEOPLE WHILE BACK!" Salvation Arm-mee! Salvation AAAAAAArmy! Put a nickel in the DRUM! Save another drunken BUM! Testimony! All the women shall wear grass skirts! Boooooo! But all the men–ah-*hah!*–shall drive LAWNMOWERS!!! What? HOOOOOOOOORAAaaay! Salvation AAAAARM-my!

The Band-Aid taped over the nail inside her shoe was loosening. She dropped back behind the other Dionysids to retape it. Standing on one foot, she held onto a drinking fountain. She could hear the men. The smacking mantle of their red-bloodedness hung over the softball diamond. "Sock it to me, you mothers!" "Yaaaaaaaah . . . yer ass!" The men, whipping up the air, razzing, jeering, hawking. This sound, males at their malest, came to her as love and Oz incarnate. It seemed the great and sudden I AM awaiting her behind the veil of bushes and Cyclone fencing.

Bare-chested, there was Campbell, the top half of his body . . . the bats, the gloves. And Ollie, the big "spade," Bert. Ollie was bare-chested, too, standing in the sun, his back as slick as an eggplant. Campbell sauntered up to bat and knocked a humiliating grounder down the line to third base. Then there came Renz, who worked at Lockheed, and Renz lobbed the ball to first base slowly, no sweat, people, that ball will arrive. Then someone came home. This runner heaved himself against the backstop amid a cloud of cheers and jeers and whistles.

Fortune watched all this from under the bleachers.

She was crouching there, hiding.

She had been running to catch up with the others, after taping her shoe, when the sun glanced off a pair of Polaroid sunglasses.

There across the field–*a mile! a millennium!* on the horizon, like lightning or the Song of Solomon–came the dentist.

He was wearing an alpaca sweater, mustard-colored.

He was bouncing a set of car keys in the air.

That moment, that millennium, was when she, Fortune, had done the thing that she . . .

. . . do not at this time care to explain, Bert.

She had run under the bleachers to hide. The staggered planks, the shadows, the legs aided her, abetted her. She was terrified to move. *Take me out to the ball game!!!* Her legs doubled under her began to throb . . . *Cracker Jacks! I do not care if I ever get back! Oh root root-root for the home team . . . if they do not win it is a shame!*

She duck-walked slowly–God in his heaven above would only know how slowly–cautiously, she moved through the candy wrappers and rumpled cigarette packages. The spike heels on her shoes made this difficult. She spread out a newspaper, a shoppers' news . . . only the barest of cracklings. She sat down on it. She unbent her legs and rubbed them, picking off a Sno-cone cup impaled on the end of a spike heel. Less than a foot from her head was a row of feet. These sprouted into calves. Voices from above identified the feet: Marguerite Parker, Janet Manfire, Lynn Peterson, Marilyn Stanwood Reid, Grisdale LaFleur's girlfield . . . other people. . . . Some tapped ashes; like artificial snow they filtered down through the sunlit cracks of the bleachers. Slits, spaces, peek-holes appeared in the shadows. She could see Gary Walker through them. Next to him, Weldon Cerkvenik and Grisdale LaFleur. Gris was cracking his knuckles. Now came Milo Campbell, jiggling back and forth, socking his fist into his softball glove. Above his sweat pants an elastic band could be seen from . . .

. . . the real name is "athletic supporter," Bert.

And where was . . .? Ah, he could not be seen, no; the mystic dentist had drifted into the wings, fading, fading. . . .

Somebody burly, a bear of a man, stepped up to the plate and slammed the bat against the bare air. Then he swung and missed the ball twice.

Campbell cackled, "Hey, Casey! Can't mix it up today, stud, or what? Mudville, yay-y!"

The burly man tapped the plate and danced and told the pitcher to put it right there, you mother humper, let them see if the pitcher could pitch. Now Biscuit moved into view of the shadowed peek-hole. She had been uncasing beer. Now she disappeared. Fortune then sensed the bleachers quivering. She moved slowly, quietly through the debris under the bleachers until she was sitting under . . .

. . . him.

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She could read his shoes. Cat's Paw . . . God, how human he was! How fragile he was! A repaired rubber heel on his shoe! His socks went up, up . . . too far . . . there was no flesh to be seen. The dentist, his own man, turned his wasp's head in his Flash Gordon glasses . . . and his glance disintegrated the bleachers beneath him.

Fortune froze.

"And what'samatta with the dentist, hey, big boy?" This was Campbell's voice. Now she could see Campbell. He was pinching his nostrils. He hitched officiously at the strap of his "jockstrap." What was *he* trying to prove? Yes, Mr. Boyfriend, we know you are trying to remind yourself you are still there! "What'samatta with the dentist? Something un-American about softball? Hey?"

"Honey!" Biscuit called to Campbell. "Didn't you hear me? I said your jockstrap is showing! Do you want some beer?" Biscuit, too, was overhead. She sat now, wrestling with the beer cans. "Your little girlfriend isn't here," she said. Now she was talking to the dentist.

"Something un-American about softball?" This was Campbell again, calling from behind the Cyclone backstop.

The dentist said: "I'm not a member. So I can't play." How level! What a voice! It seeps down into the bleachers, down through the sun slats and shadows. It barely rattles the Three Musketeers wrapper.

How Fortune remembered the sound of it . . . after all these months. He had said the Fourth of July: "I'm not a member. I'm just using your grass for a shortcut, okay?" And then he had said—or had not said, who knew?—"I will meet you back here when the party is over." Or maybe he had said: "They tell me you have never been pl***** before. Word has got it that you are still in your natural state. We will take care of that. If you ever have any trouble—with your *teeth*, that is—why do you not come up and see me sometime?" Although Bert insisted that the dentist had said: "Why do you not pick me up and smoke me sometime." But she had argued back, through the months, that the dentist had said: "I will meet you back here when the party is over."

"*You're a guh-guh-guhroovy good group, katz and jammers!*" This was television's Randy, the emcee on PAIR-OFF! "*. . . look-see to find out who's our first PAIR-OFF! pair today! Who's it gonna be this week, katz and jammers, who's it GONNA BE???*"

The screen split vertically. A nymph appeared on the left, flicking back sheets of tinsely hair. Keen of eye and nostril, she bit her lip for the camera. She sat on a throne; the back was shaped in a giant valentine. (If only there were no throne! Fortune fussed with the "contrast" dial.)

Three heart-shaped holes in a backdrop flashed onto the screen, to the right. Grin by grin, three young men popped their faces in these holes. The drums rolled. The emcee shouted: "*All-lall-lall right, Mystery Girl! Let's us let you grab a listen up to your unseen Mystery Men Number ONE . . . TWO . . . THREE!*"

Mystery Man Number One said—and his voice, strained basso, plowed through the orchestra's cymbals—"*Hel-lo, Mystery Girl.*" Numbers Two and Three said: "*Howdy there, Mystery Gal*" and "Bonjour, *Mademoiselle Mystery.*"

The Mystery Girl continued fooling with her lip. She laid forefinger to cheek—which to choose, which to choose? She gripped the arms of the throne. She bowed her lovely head, listening, and her hair dripped down about her body, a silver cataract . . . descending.

She deserves that throne, Bert.

"*All right, katz and jammers, all right now!!!*" The emcee was beside himself. "*Mystery Girl, now that you've had a chance to listen to the hellos of our hand-picked heroes, let's us find out if these young whippersnappers think as good as they sound!*"

The Mystery Girl freed her face of the shimmering hair. She read a card in her hand. "*Mystery Man Number One . . . if you were stranded on a desert island with me . . .*" And later, "*Who was Thomas Edison?* (A) *in the field of entertainment?* (B) *in the field of . . .*" And "*Number Three, sell me a dimple!*"

And so on until someone won. Pan American flew the first PAIR-OFF! couple to Honolulu . . . with prizes of portable hair dryers and hot combs and passes to Marineland. The same went to two other Mystery Girls and Men; trips were to the Bahamas and Acapulco, where Randy promised the third couple they would have "mucho fun-o."

> To Who It Might Concern Hello I am a new person in town and I was wondering what are the chances of being a Mystery Girl there happen to be a lot of things about me that have got that certain air about it to other people that mystery air if we have got to call it that. And I will say at this time that it is true there is a lot about me that is mysterious to them. You have got yourselves quite a little television show there if you get what I mean one time I was at a state fair and a man looking for girls for a pageant said I think you have got style how would you like to travel around the country and maybe later be in a movie or on television since we got the idea looking at you dancing there at the pavilion that you have got that certain something that makes people sit up and take notice of a person such as yourself the pageant needs you you dance good and could travel around this country meeting people and dancing with the men and boys anybody that has got a pair of eyes in his head can see you have got what men call class the way they were lined up to dance with you at the dance pavilion the other side of the Home Show Building what do you say there is something about the way you dress the way you talk the way you dance we cannot say as we can call it a name or it has not got one it is just that something mystery about you and then there was the time I was riding the bus minding to my own things when what happens I notice a mirror over the bus driver's head and his eyes are on that mirror until I had to turn my eyes off the mirror because he was looking so hard same problem I have got something deep and unknown inside me that makes them want to say hold on a minute miss I got ahold of your eyes in the mirror and I am not the same since same problem with men and mirrors and I know how to

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meet the public on its own terms and I would just like to say to you at this time that you have got yourself quite a program there PAIR-OFF! the way you bring a girl and a man together you send them to Hawaii now there is an idea I admire it is a state where people are dreaming to go not only that but not too long ago a while back I had a success as one of the topnotch pastry designers on the West Coast my firm was planning to send me to open a branch in Phoenix or New York but I said thank you but no thank you gentlemen I take your offer as an honor I will stay right here in this state if you do not mind here is where my life is shaping up Oh come on Miss Dundy then how about at least making one little business trip to show our product but then I had an offer and success from one of the largest figure control firms on the West Coast so when you are picking girls for PAIR-OFF! keep in mind Fortunée Dundy we will be a blue ribbon team I have got respect for a show such as yourself that makes so many young couples find each other also I have been selected for the famous club Dionysus West and that is another thing to keep in mind when you are thinking of

F. Dundy

She attached these several sheets of mauve stationery to the application blank and sent along the snapshot of herself with the Fourth of July trophy.

PAIR-OFF! answered the following week. She was not eligible. She had not read the entry blank very well; she was six years over the age limit. But she was invited to be a guest of the show and participate in the studio audience.

She tacked up a notice on the Bacchus Bulletin board.

TO Who It Might Concern Dionysid F. Dundy is going to be on the television show PAIR-OFF! if you want to "get it all together" and team up and get behind a member watch her she will be the one in the black dress with the chantilly sleeves.

"I will be the one in the black dress," she told Biscuit and Campbell. "Do you ever notice how Randy, the emcee, always picks someone to interview at half-time that is sitting next to the aisle? People always do things the easiest way, and he is no different. I will be in black chantilly. I will be next to the aisle. You two watch for me. Afterward, you tell me how I sounded. Will you?"

But the program was video-taped. So the following week Biscuit made a party for Fortune, inviting another couple for dinner, from E Wing. The man was an old surfer, his skin like mica. "Hobie," said his T-shirt. The woman, Cheryl—what a voice, Bert, scratch your fingernails over a blackboard—helped Biscuit break out the TV tables. Through the clattering of silverware, Campbell lay on the couch clipping his nails with a key-ring nail clipper.

The old surfer is acting like it is his house, Bert, the way he takes over the channel selector.

Fortune switched the channel back to PAIR-OFF!

". . . measure up in the intellect department!" Randy was shouting.

"Okay, Mystery Man Number Three," said the Mystery Girl. *"Was the play* Hamlet *written by* (A) *Jacqueline Susann,* (B) *George Plimpton,* (C) *William Shakespeare?"*

"Daddy, put napkins. Roomie, hand these to Milo."

Randy groaned. *". . . Sorry we are! You men have to watch these questions! They're trickier than the devil from time to time! . . ."*

The man in the Hobie T-shirt jabbed his arm into the air and twiddled his fingers at Cheryl: "Salt."

Fortune said, "In real life that Mystery Girl has got split ends on that hair of hers. It does not look it on television. Television makes everything look different."

"Okay, Mystery Man Number One: Tell me," said the girl, *"what good is a girl if she doesn't know how to kiss?"*

"Okay, then, katz and jammers! Hah hah hah hah! She chose him because he had 'a cute hello'! Okay, let's us give a look-see at just what is behind that cute hello! Will Number Two step out from behind our . . ."

Then, finally, chuckling and snapping the microphone cord behind him, the emcee was moving up the aisle. He asked who he had here today.

"Roomie, it's you!"

"SHHHHHHHHHHH! Is that me? Yes, that is me! Is that really what I look like? No! Really? Do I look like that?"

"You look great! Doesn't she?"

". . . and so how are you liking California?" the emcee was saying to her televised self.

This self was looking away from the microphone. It was searching for the camera it presumed was in search of her. *"To level with you, Randy, you have got yourself quite a little state here! Did you know that?"*

"Well, we like it. And we're sure glad you do, Mrs. Dundy."

"No, I am not some lucky man's 'better half' quite yet, Randy! Bachelor gal 'from the word go.' But we hope not for long! Ho ho ho. And I will just put in one more word here to all those fellows out there in Bachelorland' Hi, guys. If you happen to be in the market for a maiden . . ."

"You betcha . . .!" Randy was saying. He tried to withdraw the microphone. *"Well, thank you for being with us . . ."*

"But I will tell you one thing, Randy. You have got a show you ought to broadcast into Europe and some of those countries overseas." Her televised face looked head-on into the camera now. *"And if my brother Clagg in Fayetteville is watching, I would just like to tell him not to take any wooden nickels. But you, Randy, you people have got a show here that they ought to . . ."*

"Christ-o, Fortunée," Biscuit murmured.

". . . broadcast across the Atlantic . . . and if a certain sailor boy named Marty is listening I just want to tell him my new home is Los Angeles, California, 'Where the Stars Are,' and I now live at 146 South . . ."

It was all over. PAIR-OFF! blinked into a commercial.

"Is that what I look like in real life?" She looked around at the four people in the room. In a dream, she rose from

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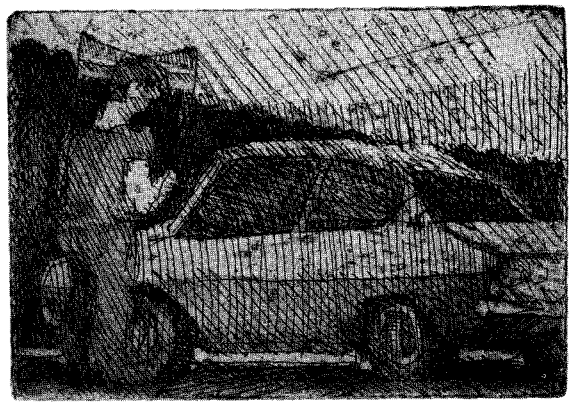

the carpet. She stepped between Biscuit and the refrigerator. "You saw me there. What is your opinion on the subject yes or no does television make everything look different?"

"Shit, man, what they ought to do," the man in the Hobie T-shirt was saying to Campbell, "is ask those poor dudes some batting averages or something they can get their teeth into."

"You looked fine, Fortunée." Biscuit was scraping plates. "Do you have to talk so loud in this small apartment?"

Fortune then turned to Milo and demanded his opinion: she asked him to choose on a scale one to ten, ten high, what number would he say she looked?

"Heavy, Champ. You walked off with the show. We're behind you all the way. You could go to the top, you know." He was peeling a pop-top ring off a can of beer. The spittle foamed up in the hole. "And, say, as long as you're asking—what was that bit again you said on the show about . . . you were a 'maiden'?"

"I do not see that it hurts to let people know a person is single and not married," she said.

" 'Maiden,' Champ, doesn't mean 'single.' "

"For your information, Mr. Beer, the people and 'the general viewing public' know what I am saying! They are not the ones to squibble about words even if you, Mr. Concussion Head, do like to do things of that nature!!!"

Biscuit came in, drying a fork. "Still and all, Roomie, 'maiden' doesn't mean single."

"It will mean what I say it means or be damned!"

" 'Maiden,' " Campbell said, "outdated as it may be—or as you might put it, 'in olden-days talk'—doesn't mean unmarried. 'Maiden' means you ain't neveh made it with anybody, Champ."

"You do not know olden-days talk or modern-day talk or anything under this sun because all you know, you, pudding you, is that you want ice on your privates and tell people you will do them favors that are not—and do not try to tell the rest of the world how to live her life!!!"

"Ruh-oomie!" Biscuit pretended to reel back. "Roomie, what are you talking, Roomie? Are you putting us on? You've never . . .?"

While Campbell, incredulous, kept saying that Fortune was camp, "Still cherry? Camp. Very high camp."

"Roomie, no!" Biscuit squealed, and acting as if she tried to stifle the squeal, was turning to Cheryl. "Oh, Cher," she muttered, "this is too sad for words." Then to Fortune: "Oh, poor Roomie! No wonder you're so hung up! Poor thing, why didn't you *tell* us?" She was now sitting on the couch, slowly drawing her fingers through Campbell's hair. "Oh, Roomie, really? Oh, how tragic. Really? But, Roomie, . . . why, you're almost thirty years old!"

"*But that lucky old sun ain't got nothing to do . . .!*" She was fooling around and waiting and watching. Now he was heading for the mailboxes.

Sliding—she was casual, to be sure—she arrived at her mailbox. She pretended to fight with the little door. He arrived at his mailbox.

"*. . . but roll around in heaven all day! Oh Lawd above* . . . Oh! And good evening to you, Doctor. '*. . . can't you heah me callin'* ' . . ."

And where are you, at that time, standing in relation to Miss Besqueth's ex-husband—and we will talk loud on the "ex" part of that earmark . . .?

"*. . . Work for my woman, toil for my kids* . . . We professional types do not get to pick up our mail until the rest of the world has gone home or do you find yourself looking at the situation in that light of affairs, or not?"

"Yeah, I'll say," the dentist said. He was standing to her left. His mailbox was on the bottom row.

"*. . . sweat like the devil all the day* . . . It is peculiar that I am running into you just now. Life is funny. Maybe you do not remember me, we danced. I thought maybe you were in an automobile crash. I was just on my way to Colonel Sanders Fried Chicken or The Golden Cock to treat myself to a congratulations chicken dinner and him whoever else wanted to tag along. Anybody that wants to come, I am in the chips. My treat. Fourth of July. *Sweat like the devil all the day . . . !*"

He said, "What's the congratulations for?"

"Oh. My new position."

"Well. Congratulations." He polished his Polaroid sunglasses with his handkerchief.

In his car, a cavern, a casket that moves across the face of the earth toward The Golden Cock, it says "Polara." She is telling him that her new profession involves one of the major firms on the West Coast, that it means public contact and a person has got to "look sharp, be sharp. They are always watching to see—say, you have got a cuff button unbuttoned there—if a person has got that special way of handling a client." She tells him that her employers knew right away when she walked in for an interview that their product would be safe in the hands of a person with flair.

But her words are collecting about them both. They are floating and nestling about Skip Fritchey. He opens her door at the parking spot, and the piles of collected, fallen words tumble out the door like dry leaves and fall onto the pavement to blow away.

She tosses her fall over her shoulder and retrieves it, spreads it over her shoulder again.

She touches things on the table . . . salt shaker . . . ashtray, "Coors" . . . napkins . . . now the menu, flicking

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it with her fingernail, and her eyes ripple over the words there—what language is this? The señorita sleeves of the black dress brush across the tabletop. "*. . . roll around in heaven all day!*"

From behind his menu, he says . . . he asks: "You, say, you're really a . . . tense person, aren't you?"

"Tense? Ho ho ho. That is a 'scream,' like they say. You thinking I am 'tense,' but that is a good word for some people, do not get me wrong, you doctors know, yes, and what is your word for 'tense' is my word for my mind concentrating on my first big day tomorrow. Selling. 'Tense' could mean how am I going to sell the things when I get to the first door? And then I ring the doorbell. Here." She lifts the red sample case—or is it rising of its own?—to the table. She opens it. The crowded, wedged and busy little cosmetic samples gleam innocently. They speak, these little samples.

They are so small, so unassertive, they bother no one with their small size. It seems to her it will be necessary to defend them from the long gaze, the languor of this man who once took a wife. She will have to protect the little samples against someone who sloughs off wives the way a reptile shirks last season's skin. "Yes, true, they are little," she says now. "But you can see them real size here in the catalogue. Here is the catalogue. Now. You have got to put your hand out. Do that. Put your hand out." She removes a tiny tube of cream from the valise.

(Hold the . . . you did, at that time, actually tell him to . . . his hand out?

You just leave him to me, Bert. He knew it was all business and that Acting Forward might be A.F. in some situations but in others it is just business!)

The dentist places his hand on the table.

(Yes, but. Could you share with us at this time . . . sure he did not think you . . . making up excuses to touch him? If we are not out of line with that opinion?)

Fortune turns his palm up gingerly and squirts it full of hand cream.

(Beg pardon, Miss Dundy. But will you tell . . . *your* palm feel like when blah blah touches it in the middle with something? Do you not remember reading in That Book about . . . "erogenous zones"?)

She removes more samples from the red case, and the dentist says, "You've covered up the life line."

"Beg pardon?"

"You've covered up the life line in my palm. If somebody wanted to read it, he wouldn't be able to read part of the love line or the money line either, because of the hand lotion. Because of House of Circe."

"What? Well, yes, true, I guess I have gone and done that. But we will save that for a day we have not got House of Circe on our minds. They tell me, anyway, that a person needs a gypsy to handle that type of situation with the palms. Now, if you will just rub that in, you will notice a noticeable difference in your skin."

He says, "Why don't you do it?"

"Yes, and I am not a gypsy. They tell me you need a gypsy to handle that type of opinion."

Then he says, no, why doesn't she rub the cream in? is what he means.

"Yes, well, I am taking my samples out of my sample case. If you will just rub that cream in, I will tell you more."

Skip Fritchey massages, slowly, his own palm . . . ."So tomorrow's the big day? Apprehensive?"

"Yes, I have got a butterfly or two, like they say, about tomorrow, that you thought I was 'tense' about today. But I will do it. It is like the man at the interview says, I am a natural sales person. He could see I was the kind of person they were looking for, with my own terms and the own terms of the public."

"And what might those be?"

"Its own terms! What else!" She sweeps her tiny barricade of Circe samples off the table and into the red valise.

"Jumbo order of the chicken and two ice teas," says the dentist to the waitress. The woman turns to leave, and Fortune pops a toilet-water sample into her apron pocket.

"Compliments, House of Circe, honey," she says. "That is House of Circe . . . seer-see . . . *C-i-r-c-e.*"

The dentist says, "You were saying about the public's terms."

"Look here," she says. "You be the customer. And I be me."

"Aren't you always you?"

"Yes, that is what I said!"

"Okay. I am the customer."

"And so you see, madam, after you use your Circe Cleansing Lotion, you have got your Circe Beauty Brace. Now a less 'classy' line of cosmetics might say 'astringent.' But I will give you this one piece of advice: Do Not Be Anybody's Fool. It is not the same. Ours, Beauty Brace, tops off your whole cleaning situation with an extra tingle. It draws those pores together smooth as a baby's skin, 'gets it together,' hah hah hah. Have you got yourself a pimple? Yes, I see you do. In the case of that pimple you might want to buy our Circe Medi-Cream for those devil bumps that pester us all from time to time throughout our lifetimes, short as life is. And, why, here, madam, here, hon, I forgot. Here you have got your Circe Tightening Grains. These get down in there. They rout out all that pore matter and grit and tighten those pores. Now. Are you going to a party? A wedding? Dancing! You want to smell just as nice as you look! Not one but three! Spray tops and matching purse-size models . . . see it all here in the catalogue, Circe's 'Odyssey,' Circe's 'Lorelei,' and then here you have got your perfume 'knock-out,' Circe's 'Fatale.' Now: Let us try ourselves a squirt of our Number Four makeup base here. Let us put our Number Four right here on this side of your face."

She rubbed the makeup on his face and felt faint.

"I don't know," he says. "My husband is awfully big on the natural look."

Under her fingers, his light stubble is a thousand living things. . . . "Surely! And you think he is going to know you have got our Number Four on! He will think it is your natural complexion! That is why I am here—to help you look natural!"

"Well," says the dentist, "just so I'm sure to look natural."

"You will look as natural as the flowers in May."

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"He says nature knows best when it comes to putting a lot of gook on."

". . . 'a lot of' . . .! What does your husband do?" Fortune says.

"He . . . he's a bookie."

"Yes, and would I try to tell your husband about books! No, I would not! So you tell your husband not to tell me about skin! Now . . . here is a mirror. Look. Even your skin does not know the difference from what is nature's handicap. Why . . . that Number Four is so natural, I will eat my hat or your husband will be saying to you, 'Why do you look so natural tonight? I cannot get over how natural you are looking these days!' "

"Oh, you'd never hear him saying that. He's not one to dish out compliments."

"Huh! That is for sure! Why did you ever marry him?"

"We . . . we had to," Skip Fritchey says.

"Phooey! You have not got to do anything in this world you do not want to but be lonely! You should never have married a person that does not give you compliments. But it is too late now, never mind. Listen. Do you want me to tell you by what name we call Number Four at the plant? We call it"—she lowers her voice, leans—" 'Super-Natural.' "

"It doesn't say 'Super-Natural' on the bottle."

"Yes, of course not, honey! Of course it does not say 'Super-Natural' on the bottle! Do you think we at Circe go around giving out our code names to every Thomasina, Dixie, and Harriet? Well? Do you?"

"No," he says. "I suppose you Avon people do have your reasons."

"Avon? *A*-von? That one-horse outfit!!! We are HOUSE . . . OF . . . CIRCE . . . read! Yes, and I will pardon you this time, you have got kids and housework and do not get a chance to get out to the movies to keep you from being dowdy. If you did, you would recognize House of Circe right up there on all the stars' faces."

The dentist scrapes a fingernail across his cheek and examines his face in the mirror she is holding for him. "Hmmmm," he says. "This junk's so heavy I'd have to have a face-lift after each application. Say . . . did you say *'movies'*? You mean like Earl Westmore?"

"*WESTMORE! Westm* . . . well, yes, if you mean the backwoods company that clogs the stars' pores, yes, all right. Please, can we change the subject onto something more professional?"

"I was about to say that myself. Zach'll be home in a minute and . . ."

Fortune says, "Madam, do you want to know a secret?"

"All right. I wouldn't mind."

"Around the plant we call this Number Four base 'The Liquid Makeup That the Stars Use.' "

"I'm glad to know that. Who uses it?"

"You mean to tell me," she says, "that you want me to tell you who uses it?"

"Yes," the dentist says. "You said the stars use it. Which stars?"

"You want to know right now? 'Right off the top of my head?' I will tell you one thing 'right off the top of my head.' We surely do not call our Number Four base 'The Liquid Makeup That the Stars Use' for nothing. For one thing . . . I heard that Loretta Young uses it."

She snatches the catalogue out of his hand and throws it in her sample case, snapping that shut.

The secret to all this selling and success, she then told him, was the sky because the sky was the limit.

He said he did not know it was that simple, but he was glad to hear her say it. "All slogans, is it?"

"Yes, and that is what I am saying! Yes! You have got to get in there with that human twinkle, that subterranean . . . that stops being just jars and creams and is a living product. I do not see why you try to say it is so hard to understand, with all these questions you are asking!"

He asked her then if he could ask only one more question.

"I did not say," she cried, "you could not ask questions! If the world went around not asking questions . . . yes, I did not say no!"

Skip Fritchey dabbed at a grease spot on his tie.

Or is he dabbing at her saliva?

Her head is pounding so hard, Bert. She is sure she feels her hair growing, her blood pushing her cells to their utmost . . . but hair, the experts say, dies, so maybe she is dying. . . .

She raises her cold drumstick to her front teeth and worries the crisp skin, waiting, studying the piece of chicken.

The dentist wiped his fingers on a paper napkin . . . the gesture was foreboding. "What if you find out," he says, "that all those people aren't going to buy?"

"I can see there is no sense talking to you! Now, I do not mean there is no sense at all in it. Yes, of course there has got to be some rhyme, some reason in talking to someone in the medical profession. . . ."

She told him then that her gums bled when she brushed her teeth, and Skip Fritchey said it was gingivitis and for her to massage those gums hard with Stim-u-dents. □

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Silver and Gold

A Story by William Kittredge

Carlos Fuller sat in the bunkhouse bullpen drinking a warm can of Miller's from the case under his bed. The other men had changed quickly when they came in from the short morning of work and had already gone to town. He was still in his work clothes, worn Levi's and a washed-out shadow plaid western shirt, cuffs stiff with dried-in blood from butchering the week before.

Carlos drained the beer, stripped and showered and thought, listening to the water beating off the metal stall, standing with his head bowed while it plastered hot on the back of his neck, how different this was going to be from any Christmas he could remember. This year there would be only Ellen and Morgan and himself. He shaved slowly and dressed in new Levi's and a clean white shirt with button-down collar and pulled on his town boots, year-old Blouchers made to order, plain kangaroo with stovepipe tops, solid black, and thought about taking a drink from the bottle of Johnny Walker under his bed, but didn't. There was no use showing up smelling of whiskey. This was supposed to be a day when they acted like human beings. "I see no reason the three of us can't have the meal together and open presents," Ellen had said. "You and I owe Morgan at least that much."

And they did, they owed her that much at least. So he walked out the bunkhouse door without even a taste and started across the open lot toward the house, a dark and heavy man of thirty-eight whose features, nose and cheeks, were coarsening as he aged. Carlos was living in the bunkhouse because of the divorce. On the second day of December Ellen had been granted divorce on a non-contested claim of mental cruelty, nothing like the disgrace it could have been had they not agreed to ignore the futile questions of guilt and innocence and misdirection. The decree would be final on the second day of February.

The house already looked different, as if he were going to visit strangers. This must be what it's like, he thought, imagining lives of drifters who worked for him. The isolation of wandering without responsibility, job to job, seemed at least momentarily appealing. He remembered all the years since childhood, men coming up to the house for Christmas dinner and drinks carefully rationed to keep them sober, turkey and candy and all the rest, and his grandfather talking. "Keeps them on the place," the old man said, while the white-faced and quiet men, dressed in whatever stiff new town costume they owned, robbed of whatever holiday they would have preferred and in that robbery also done out of dignity, came uphill across the lot. Now I'm making that walk, Carlos thought, like this wasn't my place and that wasn't my house. He felt like going back to the whiskey bottle and wished he was with his crew, on his way toward the taverns. Going to where no one cared what you did, to drink and wake up sick in a motel room with a woman beside you in the bed, whoever she was, then just look at her sleeping there with ropey hair all over the pillow and walk out and drive up town alone, wondering if the bars were open. Yet there was this feeling of loss. He wondered how long it was going to take for him to learn to make his life be exactly what he wanted, surprised that he would like going up to the house in the old way, as if he belonged, toward the clean pink and white tile bath off the master bedroom, the king-sized bed with a woman in it. He hadn't felt that way in a long time.

To Ellen. That was what he wanted, finally. He wondered how she slept, if she ever lay awake thinking about how they had gotten where they were, remembered nights, the house creaking as it cooled, as it always had. The outline of the windows across the room would show faintly against the darkness and across their rectangular shapes would of course lie the shadow of the seventh tree in the row north of the house. It would all be completely familiar.

Ellen breathing quietly beside him. The dark familiarity of the room like a ghost, a spirit surrounding him, filled with the objects of their marriage, purple frilled lamps on the bed tables and carpet laid only a year ago, the chair she'd bought him to hang his clothes on, a special thing he'd never used.

He would raise his arm and look at the luminous dial of his watch, slide his feet out onto the carpet, moving slowly so he didn't wake her. She would seem unchanged, go on breathing her sleep toward him. And he would find his cigarettes and smoke, trying to see how this could be different if he wanted it enough. He would imagine he understood. The trouble was he wanted everything and nothing enough. He would go downstairs and have a drink from his bottle in the kitchen.

WILLIAM KITTREDGE is widely published, though this is his first appearance in the NAR; he is on the English staff at the University of Montana.

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The bedroom was Ellen's, large and light on Sunday mornings. He would wake and everything would be in place except his clothing, scattered beside the bed when he undressed in the dark, and find her moving quietly, dusting and straightening. She seemed continually to occupy herself with order. Newly cut flowers would be reflecting in the mirror over her dressing table and his cup of steaming coffee would be on the table beside him. She would glance and see him awake and without speaking go down to the kitchen to begin his breakfast, sure she knew what he wanted, performing in a role learned perfectly, each movement strictly ordered in some way he could never understand.

Ahead in the seventy-year-old house built by his grandfather: frame, white painted, where his mother and grandfather had died, where his family had always lived. He let himself into the yard through the pipe-frame gate and scuffed his feet on the grass to clean his boots. The lawn was enclosed by rows of silver and lombardy poplar and cottonwood planted by his grandfather, and those gray and leafless trees seemed guardians of order. Carlos walked around toward the front door for some reason he didn't understand except as perhaps a way of getting at Ellen, letting her see how he felt. Just for a moment he stood between the clumps of bare-limbed lilac, looking south, smoking. The creek was turning darker, muddier, rising. He flipped his cigarette onto the wet lawn and went up the steps and rang the bell, wondering when Ellen and Morgan had decorated the tree. He could see it glittering through the living room window, identifiably patterned. Hours spent over tinsel and balls and lights, trying to reduce the colors, red and yellow and silver and gold imposed on fir-tree green, to some idiot level of organization. She never quits, he thought, trying to despise her and finding himself touched by memories of evenings spent reading while she and Morgan worked over their creation. He remembered pictures of bare-breasted and platter-lipped African women in an old *National Geographic*, Ellen and Morgan talking, the shocking sound of glass cutting and breaking when Morgan stepped on a tissue-thin red ball.

Morgan answered the door wearing a new and sleeveless black dress with a high, formal neckline and a single strand of pearls, all of which seemed too old, out of place, making her arms seem pale and thin, completely a child's. "How do you do," she said, smiling, dipping in mock curtsy. "Are you expected?"

"I guess," he said. "I heard I was."

"Let me take your hat," she said. "You do have a hat, don't you? Surely you don't come calling without a hat."

"Never wear a hat," he said, carrying on with whatever game she wanted to play. "Shrinks the skull." He had hoped Ellen would answer the door. So they could play another game, he thought, perhaps more childish. He'd wanted to stand and make Ellen see her guilt in estranging him from this house where he had always lived, built by his grandfather for his grandmother, the extent to which she was wrong.

The lighted tree reflected off the bay windows, as the trees always had, but seemed barren. A few packages, wrapped in Ellen's traditional silver and gold paper, were scattered beneath. The little fir was much smaller than the trees they'd had in previous years. A town-bought tree. Ellen had bought this one from the lot run by Boy Scouts in front of the Safeway and lugged it home in the trunk of her Continental, struggled into the house with it herself. "We waited for you to bring one," his daughter had said, telling him about the tree. "But you didn't."

Always before they had gone into the mountains between the valley and town and cut their own, plowed up through snow until they were miles from the highway, deep in the forest and alone. Then they hiked uphill from the logging road, picking among trees, knocking snow from the branches and inhaling the deep and clean, dustless odor of bruised fir, walking slowly, sizing up trees until they agreed on the right one for this year. After cutting the tree they went downhill toward the place where the Jeep pickup sat in snow at the end of its own trail-breaking tracks, Carlos dragging the tree, butt forward, and carrying the saw. Ellen and Morgan struggled and floundered, laughing and pitching handsful of snow at each other, ending cold and wet and red faced and submissive to his disapproval in the pickup with the heater going.

The tree, once the base was on, would reach almost to the ceiling, and with the butt set in water would last until New Year. On the second of January they would take it down, and that was another ceremony, the beginning of a motionless and clouded long day which lay between then and spring. Ellen drank hot wine he hated and he had a few beers and perhaps a shot from the bottle of bourbon in the kitchen – in those days she had always bought him bourbon instead of scotch – and they repacked the decorations and hauled the tree, dangling tinsel like a thin and sparkling memory, down to the dump and burned it.

Sometimes the whole dump, covered with the refuse of months, would catch and come afire and they would stand and watch the quick flame spread and grow, drying as it progressed, then get into the Jeep and drive home. Ellen would have hot potato soup and cold sandwiches and they would eat and sit before the stone fireplace his grandfather had built seventy years before, and as the fire died and winter truly began each would go separately up to bed. Carlos was always last, turning out the lights, at least in his memory.

"Kind of a little tree," he said. "I'd have got a bigger one."

"But you didn't," Morgan said. "We waited for you." She left him standing a stranger in the center of his own living room, the house he remembered being a child in, while she went off through the hallway toward the kitchen. The black down-filled leather chair that had cost six hundred dollars nearly ten years before, one weekend when he was following Ellen around the furniture stores, was left of the fireplace, where it had been since he bought it. He stood fingering the familiar creases in the leather, listening to the muted, unintelligible voices from the kitchen. Morgan was changing, in many ways seemed nearly a woman. He could not remember hearing them talk like equals before, at least in the sounds they made, like geese feeding.

He was moving back into the house after the first of the year, and Ellen and Morgan were leaving. Silent and cold,

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he imagined, without even the compensations of the bunkhouse, the warmth and banality. He would be isolated, come every day to this cold house and sit alone and be unable to help remembering the rooms as they had been when Ellen and Morgan were here, and see the years before that, his grandfather in black clothing, worn shirt and twill pants, warming his hands before going out into the predawn cold to wrangle the horses off frozen meadows, his father winter afternoons with his wool-stockinged feet up, sipping on a glass of bourbon and reading *Western Horseman* and *Sports Afield*. All that as a parade of things escaped. As sorrow, he thought, able to see himself drinking alone without the tranquility of his father. Sorrow and selfpity would be irresistible and eventually, half drunk, he would head for town and people who saw him would know he had nothing better to do than wander.

Carlos opened the woodbox, expecting to find it empty, swept clean as the fireplace. Instead it was full of wood carried in, he supposed, by Morgan. He took out paper and kindling and laid a fire carefully, pyramiding three blocks of split fir over the top. Then he knelt, lighting the paper with a kitchen match, snapping the head with a thumbnail.

The wood was beginning to flame when Morgan returned carrying a tray spread with stuffed olives and celery filled with pimento cheese, sweet pickles and dill, cocktail onions and special stuffed mushrooms his wife had prepared, little red tomatoes and potato chips and a bowl of French onion dip. He picked off one of the mushroom heads, large as a half dollar, and chewed it slowly while Morgan placed the elaborate tray on the table beside his chair and sat on the floor in front of the fire. "It's the first time," she said, grinning. "Damned if it's not." Her cursing, much as anything, was part of the ceremony of their Christmas. She had done it as a child, copying him, and repeated it every Christmas since. "The first fire since you left," she said. "First this winter."

She extended her hands and seemed, as the light wavered on her face, again a child, six or seven rather than fourteen, at peace and somehow, for that moment, not vulnerable. Carlos ate a slice of pickle and sat in the leather chair, leaned forward and pulled her to rest between his knees. She moved easily and sat, his hands on her shoulders, face composed and still, staring at the fire and legs curled beneath her skirt. "Remember?" she said finally. "How we used to sit when I was little. In the morning when it was cold? I remember you carrying me down from bed wrapped in my blanket, the fire going, and sitting here warm."

It seemed impossible she was old enough to grieve for losses. "You were a little girl then," he said. "Now you're not." He could think of nothing more. Before six o'clock those mornings he walked to the bunkhouse in the dark and cold and ate with the men and sat in the bullpen talking over the work, sending the crew out feeding or whatever, then he would come back through the coldest moment, as the sun rose, and stir the fire and go upstairs and wake Ellen and carry his daughter down to the living room while Ellen went to sit alone in the kitchen with her coffee, and he would hold Morgan while she struggled out of sleep.

Ellen was coming down the hallway from the kitchen, heels echoing on the bare wood floor, her familiar and almost hesitant rhythm seeming vulnerable and childlike while he knew it was not. It had been that image of defenselessness which first seriously attracted him. But she isn't, he thought. She's iron. She was coming to find and greet him when he could not, it seemed, go toward the kitchen to her. He resisted an impulse to push his daughter slightly away so Ellen wouldn't find them huddled as they were.

She was standing in the archway, smiling, eyes intense and sharp. "Aren't you cozy," she said. "That's nice. It really is."

Carlos stood. "How are you?" he said. "Are you all right?" While speaking he knew it was wrong, set the wrong tone for what they were trying to make of the day. "Are you all right?" It was like asking if she could cope with the world, if she was capable of merely existing without his protection.

Ellen's hair was combed down, nearly to her shoulders, and curled at the tips over a black wool dress and, as Morgan did, she wore a single strand of pearls. With firelight on her face, leaning against the frame of the archway, as if submissive to the house, she seemed not changed at all. "Of course," she said. "Did you imagine I wouldn't be?"

She smiled again, soft enough to lighten what she said. Morgan stood, awkwardly, and Carlos steadied her. "I meant it," Ellen said. "You looked nice sitting there again. I like seeing you together."

Morgan stood before the fire, hands outstretched to the warmth. "Don't fight," she said, voice low as the sighing flames. "Please."

"Baby," Ellen said. "We're not fighting." She hadn't moved from that stance in the archway. "We don't have to fight any more. Not ever. That's all over."

"She's right," Carlos said. "There's nothing to fight about." Ellen seemed sincere, as much a child as Morgan, again innocent, virginal, available to hurt. "We're going to have a nice time," he said. "Because we love you." The pattern of this day, created like a plot in his imagination, seemed ready to collapse.

Morgan stayed by the fire and Ellen was in the archway smiling, silent and soft, giving herself in appearance and yet withdrawn. As if she doesn't care, he thought. Like there's nothing left to talk about. Fifteen, seventeen years, Morgan. But perhaps she *was* trying, not withholding, giving. Perhaps there was nothing more left for her, perhaps they were waiting for him to say something more, still thought him capable of defining their lives, stating things they imagined existing, awaiting discovery, trusting him to make discoveries and reveal what *they* had become, the isolated three of them who had so long been the family.

"I don't know," he said. Morgan turned from the fire, hands clasped behind her. "Is that all?" She stood braced, ready to break either toward tears or anger. Ellen came from the archway, put her arms around the girl and gently shook her. "Come, Baby," she said. "Don't."

Morgan resisted, then smiled, as if the good sense of being together and happy for at least this one day could not be kept away by any barrier she had left. Ellen looked up and Carlos saw how truly relieved she was, and her eyes, before she turned away, seemed open, defenseless as they

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had ever been, as if nothing had happened and they were in the past.

She dropped her arms from Morgan's shoulders. "Would you like a drink?" she asked. "I think a drink would be good." However subtly, this seemed a change. Toward the end of their marriage she had acted as if he were another child, to be watched and kept from the harm of his own irrationality.

"I suppose," he said. Refusing would be turning down the whole of this Christmas. "The same old thing," he said. "John Walker and soda." There was no doubt she had a bottle of Johnny Walker Black in the kitchen, with the seal broken and the cork never pulled, waiting for him.

"Why don't you fix it, and one for me," she said. "I'll stay with Morgan and enjoy the fire."

He smiled, and the antagonisms of fifteen years, having caused divorce, for a moment left only a residue of empathy. His heels thunked on the hardwood, a sound familiar as any he knew, remembered from childhood, a man walking down that hallway. Each step particular and without resonance, the world as it should be, as it had been. The formal dining room looked south through small-paned windows and was lighted by three red candles in silver holders placed evenly along the surface of the dark cherrywood table that had been his mother's. Other candles burned on either corner of his mother's sideboard, where Ellen kept her silver and china, nestled in identical bases of tiny fir boughs and lacquered pine cones, remnants of decorations Ellen had made the first Christmas they were here.

How many times, he wondered, stopping to circle the room, trailing his fingers over the dustless surface of the elaborately set table, had he stood a child in this formal room, unused after his mother died, in the darkness pressing his forehead to those windows and looking south at winter over the valley, anticipating April and the melting of the snow? Or what? Not really the melting of snow, but what?

The bare table reflected the shadowy light of the candles, diffuse circles over three places set close together as formality would allow. The stand for Ellen's silver wine bucket was beside the head chair, empty and clean. Her china pattern was austere and plain, cream with a heavy gold band around the outer edge of each plate and cup. The fragile and long-stemmed wine and water glasses she almost never used were precisely arranged, crystal imported from France, so thin the sides could be bent before they broke, as the salesman had shown them one long-ago, boring afternoon on the second floor of a Portland jewelry store. Ellen had been infatuated with the treasures of glass and silver and china and he had been hung over and sat in a chair behind a clean desk and felt himself enclosed in elaboration which seemed to disguise the meaning of everything, salesmen with thousand-dollar wrist watches and a precise and yet masculine touch over the treasures they peddled – all of it too perfect and capable of yielding nothing, of being no more than what it seemed. Finally he gave her the check book and went to the dark barroom off the lobby of the Benson Hotel, where they always stayed in Portland. The discolored circle on his bar napkin pleased him and he studied it while the embossed pattern slowly dissolved as it absorbed the condensing moisture from the sides of his tall glass. Later he took a cab to a workingman's bar on the north side. It was morning when he returned to find her packing, checking out.

He pushed through the swinging door, enjoying even the familiarity of that. The bottle was on the drainboard. He poured two weak drinks, honoring Ellen's idea of this day by the light color of scotch against ice.

Ellen and Morgan were standing silently, backsides to the fire, each solemn and posed in imitation of the other, when he returned. He handed Ellen her drink and sipped and contemplated them over the rim of his. She drank quickly, kept the glass in her hand, and he thought of smiling and asking her when she had learned to drink, if she had discovered that John Walker wasn't poison. But didn't, and as Ellen stood with her glass her eyes flickered toward him and away, stranded, her plot of the day ended, all power of improvisation gone. Carlos picked another stuffed mushroom, ate it slowly, savoring the fecund taste against the bitterness of his drink, cutting the richness with a sip. "Do you remember those pearls?" Ellen asked, and he could not imagine what she was talking about. The pearls seemed identical, part of the accumulation Ellen kept in her jewel box.

"I'm giving them to Morgan," Ellen said, without seeming to sense his confusion. "She's old enough to wear them." Then he thought he understood. Morgan was wearing a string he had given Ellen when they were married. She had said they were too tight, never had them extended and wore them only once, as they left the ceremony.

"I remember," he said. "You never liked them, did you?"

"They were the wrong color for my skin. But they're perfect for Morgan. They were too white for me. She has the color for them." He never imagined that pearls came in shades. She had rejected his gift for a simple reason of fact and never explained, and he saw in that all her mistrust, the ways they attempted disguising themselves for each other. It was as much his fault as hers. How many things did he know that he could not tell her? Their failure was in the end a simple failure of trust. That simple. "I wish you'd have told me," he said. "I really wouldn't have minded."

"They were the wrong shade and too small for my neck," she said, as if the gift, with its imperfections, which could have been exchanged, was a primary failure on his part, a major thing. The wrongness of her pearls implied his love was wrong, that he couldn't be bothered to find the shade she preferred and how long the strand should be. She sipped her drink, staring into it. They were drifting toward exactly the old relationship, separate stances, each unable to give the other enough assurance of love to offset neglect, self-absorption, pride. They had seemed to be nearing, before he went to fix the drinks, a new and more formal and therefore more forgiving relationship. That was where they wanted to be, he was sure, distant enough to talk and act as they would with anyone. He tried to think of something which would save this day. For Morgan, he thought, so she can have a perfect clear thing.

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"Is that very important?" he asked. "I think Morgan should have them because they look so fine on her." Morgan was smiling and Carlos began to smile himself because he saw how clearly she perceived his intent and saw himself as she must have, stuffy and earnest. "She looks like the wicked witch," he went on, grinning at her now, enjoying her small, malicious pleasure.

"She's brown," Ellen said, and he turned, still smiling, toward her. "I was always ashamed I couldn't wear those pearls. Because my neck was muscular." Which seemed absurd. But she had spoken softly and her face was contorted, and he saw how close to tears she was, grateful to him for having done what she could not do, turn them from the familiar impasse of resentment. And there was something more, grief for lost time, hours and weeks of estrangement and resentment continued past reason, years as a young woman with children, for the life she had wanted and never been without and never valued, continuation of which now seemed impossible, as if her chances were used, wasted. He wondered if his idea of her elegiac sadness weren't only a projection of his own.

"Almost," he said. "She's almost a woman, but not quite." There seemed nothing else to say. They were stranded again. He could not imagine a way of persuading Ellen to forget and be the sort of actress her own idea of this day demanded.

"Come look at the tree," Morgan said, and gratefully he followed her across to stand before it, pretending to admire the decorations, which were the same this year as they had always been, so futile a gesture in the face of what was dissolving them. When he turned Ellen was gone – to the kitchen, he supposed.

They had eaten slowly and quietly, washing down the traditional turkey and moist dressing and yams beneath melted marshmallows with almost all the wine, small sips from the delicate glasses Ellen had poured exactly one-third full while he was carving. The wine was a light red burgundy, a Beaujolais out of the imported case Ellen brought from Portland in the trunk of her car early in the spring, and Carlos was surprised at his headiness when he walked back to the living room and stood before the sinking fire, almost overcome by a sense of quiet and relaxation. Ellen and Morgan were clearing the table and he was alone and able to enjoy thinking of nothing.

He had been surprised to find the wine bottle open on the table and warm. The silver bucket beside his chair was empty, covered by a white linen napkin. "I just brought it out because it looks so lovely," Ellen said. "I've had it nine years and never used it."

The wine bucket was one of the things she insisted on after they came home from the Air Force. He'd said it was too expensive and then bought it for her Christmas. The years since it had stood on a shelf, never used. He'd come into the kitchen the winter before and found her there in the evening's near darkness, cleaning the elaborate and flowered rim of that bucket with silver polish. She had been sullen and quiet when he asked what she was doing and there had been no meal begun and he showered and changed his clothes and went off to town and spent the night drinking.

Carlos built up the fire and stood with his back to the warmth and noticed that somehow, through the slow meal, daylight had almost passed. The window behind the Christmas tree had darkened until the reflection seemed to glitter toward him off complete blackness.

He left the fire and went up the narrow staircase off the hall, toward the second floor and the bathroom opening from the bedroom that had been his grandfather's. Lulled by the wine and the warmth of the fire, he wanted to feel only the presence of the house, his memories of living here.

The second floor hallway was lighted only by the dim window at the far end. He walked slowly, remembering himself a child, approaching his grandfather's room at least this cautiously in another kind of darkness, even though the old man was away. Opening the door in this same winter twilight and standing, afraid to enter, and seeing the almost ghostly windows on the far side, without even shades, not as sources of illumination but simply as lighter parts of the same dark wall.

He fumbled and opened the door almost as if expecting to see the barren place where his grandfather slept more than thirty years before. The room was dim and gray as it had been, but the windows were different, disguised by looping shadows of white dotted-swiss curtains Ellen always hung new every year.

The room seemed only decorated by her feminine hangings, not changed. Beneath lay the stark and hard outlines of his grandfather's plain existence. Carlos wondered what the room had been like for the old man, if a sanctuary or simply an unnoticed place where he slept and deposited the few things he seemed to think necessary to a private existence, winter clothes and a clean hat to wear on trips to town and the straight razor and foam-flecked mug and lean strop he used every morning. Behind Ellen's curtains lay his grandfather's bare-walled sleeping room.

Carlos turned on the light and the room became a woman's, colored in feminine ways and elaborate. Over the bed hung a framed photograph of his grandfather, taken a year before the old man died by a newspaperman from Portland who had been writing a story about historic ranches in eastern Oregon for his Sunday supplement. The picture had been blown up until it was the size of a painting, mostly in shades of gray, and seemed granular because of the enlargement. The dry summer day had been overcast before a storm, and they had been working cattle near the alkali flat bordering the lake at the north end of the valley. The wind that preceded the storm was gusting the white dust stirred by the milling cattle and his grandfather was coated by the alkali, as they all were, and got down from his black horse for only a moment and returned to his work, leaving the man to stand and talk with Carlos and his father.

Months later the large picture, rectangular, two feet by three and already framed, came unannounced in the mail. Ellen, for a reason that now seemed connected with her understanding of his grandfather, liked the picture and always kept it in the room. "So we won't forget where all

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this came from," she said. "It's good, once in a while, to remember."

The picture had been moved. It seemed so natural over her bed he at first hadn't noticed. Always before it hung on the far wall between the windows. She had moved it. The gesture seemed theatrical, and he smiled, picturing her with a hammer and tacks, wondering what she thought as she moved the picture, if she had yet come to see how foolish it looked.

Then he began to understand how it might not seem at all foolish to her, and went into the bathroom and stood urinating with the door open, thinking about Ellen and his grandfather's picture, himself and his grandfather. He wondered if she would take the picture when she left. He would be moving back and living in this room without her in only a few more days. All she had done, modernizing over the years, this tile bathroom, so much better than the tin shower stalls in the bunkhouse that it seemed orientally luxurious, would be his to use alone, without anyone watching. He would awaken alone in the bedroom and come to this bathroom and do whatever he wanted and then be faced only with the eventual chore of cleaning it up. And the house, surrounding him, would be empty. He flushed the toilet and turned and saw, through the open door, Ellen standing at the foot of the bed, smiling, as if delighted. "You never did shut the door," she said.

He stepped quickly from her line of sight, surprised he was so startled. As if she were a stranger, he thought, buttoning his pants. "You moved the picture," he said, standing beside her and looking at the faded image of his grandfather, the dusty background of black horse and out-of-focus, milling cattle.

"I don't know why," she said. "I just wanted it there." The old man had stood with his head forward, as if angry. And probably he was, Carlos thought. To the old man there had been nothing important but work. The idea of the photographer tromping in the dust in his low-cut city shoes, circling his grandfather and snapping pictures, seemed almost comic. The old man's arms were bowed at his sides and his hat was pushed back and he was glaring and the line of dust beneath where his hat had been was straight and clear.

"That's all there is of him," Ellen said. "All that's left. A picture for you to smile at."

She seemed, now that she was serious, melodramatic. "He's been dead a long time," Carlos said.

"You're going to want that picture," she said. "Aren't you? I guess that's why I put it up there, because I'm leaving."

"You can take it," Carlos said. "I always figured that picture just about caught him at his worst."

"Thank you." She touched his shoulder, reaching her body toward him rather than just her arm. "There's nothing we can do," she said. "Is there?" She hesitated, dropped her hand back to her side. She was right about the picture, Carlos thought. It meant something even to him. The thing was mostly sad, Carlos thought, attempting to avoid thinking of the touch on his shoulder. Sad because the old man was dead and it could all be reduced to a picture.

Ellen went on talking, laughing a little, and Carlos felt he had never before tried to understand what the old man, simply by what he was, the part that could be printed on paper, could have been capable of letting them know. In the stillness, the compressed lips of the pictured man, lay the essence of what he was seeing. By his refusal ever to talk to the end of anything the old man had meant something. Perhaps it was just that there was nothing to say.

"Morgan's waiting," Ellen was saying. "You go down. I'll be just a moment." She turned and went into the bathroom. Carlos remained looking at the picture. The old man was in there somewhere. Always while growing up Carlos had puzzled over his grandfather's insistent, brooding silences. Until he decided they meant nothing, that worrying about them was silly, childish. And now his thoughts seemed equally a child's. It was nothing but a picture and the old man was dead and beyond that there was nothing to be understood, no one to be released. He started for the door when he heard the toilet flushing. Ellen's voice called him back.

"I just wanted you to know," she said. "If I don't say this I never will. This afternoon, before you came up, I couldn't think of anything but wanting you." She stopped, rubbing her hands on her skirt as though drying them.

There was nothing kind to say. All he felt about the thing she had taken from him was summed in the bitterness he felt. "Too late," he said. "You played that game." He went back down the stairs without listening to see if she followed.

"Took you long enough," Morgan said. She was in the black leather chair before the fire and looked small and pale against the massive bulk.

"We got to talking about your great-grandfather's picture," he said. He stood behind the leather chair and leaned his forearms on the back and looked down at her. "I guess it's about time," he said.

"Not yet." Morgan twisted back in the chair, suddenly anxious, her face only inches from his. "We haven't opened the presents."

"That's what I mean, the presents."

He'd come without anything. Hadn't even thought they would expect presents. He was going to give Morgan 160 acres of land he owned in the middle of government land on the desert to the east, one of the range stations, the Waterfall Camp. It was the place she loved most of any he knew, and now she would own it. The land would give her a tie to the valley when she was away. Ellen, he was sure, expected nothing.

Coming in the NAR:

THE WOMAN'S VOICE IN
MODERN NORWEGIAN POETRY
Translations by F. H. König

CLARA KLEINSCHMIDT
A new novella by
Carol Hebald

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He was going to lease the property from Morgan for a thousand dollars a year, her own money, separate from the support money, to spend as she wanted. The thousand dollars was due the second day of each January. The Monday after New Year's he would drive her to Klamath Falls so she could catch an airplane for San Francisco, where people from the boarding school in Palo Alto would meet her. He would give her the first check when she got on the airplane and caution her about spending it wisely. He hoped the check would distract her from the idea she was leaving.

Carlos walked to the tree and looked at the packages under the bottom branches and wanted, when he saw packages for him, to simply turn and walk out. It was Ellen's fault. She had allowed this to happen, trapped him. He turned, and Ellen was standing behind the chair where Morgan sat. He hadn't heard her and saw she was wearing slippers, white with embroidered flowers across the instep. They were both silent, looking at him, waiting, as if expecting him to do what he had imagined, crush them away and walk past to the door and leave, end this day.

"Why don't we do it the way we always did?" he said, committing himself to the enactment of this scene they seemed to want so badly. They had constructed this day, he felt, to end perfectly, and he was separated from them, as he had been, by his sure knowledge this was hopeless. The edge of formality that had preserved them so far would not withstand this.

"That would be nice," Ellen said. She touched her daughter's shoulder and Morgan rose from the chair and started toward him, her face serious and happy.

"You sit in the chair," Morgan said. "I'll bring the packages." They had always done it that way. Ellen sat on the arm of his chair, to his right, almost touching him, and he was aware of her scent, the same slight perfume she had always worn. Morgan laid the packages, one at a time and carefully, silently, in front of him, and as she did Ellen leaned forward, touching his shoulder with her breasts, and then away. There were eight packages, some larger than others, one very small, each identically wrapped. Two were his.

"I guess we can begin," he said. Morgan was standing with her hands slightly raised, betraying uncertainty. He had brought nothing but his idea of a gift for Morgan, no physical thing at all, just the idea of giving her the Waterfall Camp. The day was going to end with imperfection. He could, with some gift for Ellen, salvage the construct of kindness and distance they had begun. "You're first," he said, smiling at Morgan. "You always were. That's how we do it."

And while Morgan opened her packages, strewing the floor with torn paper which Ellen collected and threw on the fire, he tried to think of something he could give Ellen, something which would maintain proper formality and their distance, anything to reassure Morgan.

Morgan's gifts were all clothing, except for the smallest package, which she opened last. And that was a small and feminine watch of gold which reflected the firelight. She put it over her wrist and held it toward him and he nodded and smiled while Ellen leaned forward from her perch on the chair arm again and he felt her breasts touching his shoulder, her hair alongside his face. The motions they were making seemed to show nothing had changed and yet everything had, because the touch of her body, however faint, was unlike the idea of its having been offered. He was completely distracted, could only pretend indifference, because it seemed to be what she now expected. Go on as we did, he thought, and then she leaned away and the touch was gone.

"One last thing for Morgan," his wife said, and she held out in her palm a small ring, silver and plain, without engraving. Morgan took the ring quietly and slipped it over the index finger of her left hand, as if she had known it would fit only there. The assured motion was strange, he thought, and implied she and Ellen were together and he was excluded. Their unity and his exclusion were symbolized by that ring.

He asked what the ring meant and Morgan only smiled and shook her head, and then he was sure he was being cut out of something between them and he asked again and again she refused. The ring was perhaps three-eighths of an inch in width and seemed, on her finger, the sort of thing she would never wear, occult, and upsetting. "Makes you look like some damned gypsy," he said. "Not like somebody who would know anything about horses."

When she didn't answer he turned away. He had no interest in the object, but felt he had to get inside and shatter whatever small construction of faith or trust she had with Ellen which did not include him. "Not the last thing," he said, looking at Ellen. "I've got something." Then he looked back at Morgan, trying to ignore Ellen at his shoulder, and told her about the Waterfall Camp. Her reaction surprised and disappointed him. Her teasing smile faded and she seemed to withdraw, as after the divorce, stood looking into the fire, turning the ring slowly on her finger. While watching he was trying to think of something he could give Ellen. Something that would tell Morgan love existed, and that even separate they were going to remain her protection.

"For Ellen," he said, beginning the sentence without knowing how he would finish it. "I have something for Ellen." What?

"The picture," he said, knowing while speaking that it was not right. "The picture of my grandfather and my mother's dining room set." It was all wrong.

"Thank you," Ellen said. The moment was past and he had failed and knew they understood he had. He opened the two packages that were for him. The smallest was a red woolen Pendleton shirt from Morgan and the largest a soft, sheepskin-lined leather coat from his wife. Morgan, his wife told him while the girl continued staring silently into the fire, had saved from her allowance to buy him the shirt.

The coat was heavy and the leather so soft it seemed almost velvet, and it fit perfectly. "Let me leave these here," he said. "They'll be ruined in the bunkhouse." He spoke while standing childishly between them, his arms extended to exhibit the coat, feeling cold and hammered metallic stones in the heart. He almost could not breathe as he walked the darkening hallway toward the kitchen, heading for his bed in the bunkhouse even though it was only early evening. □

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A STORY BY FREDERICK BUSCH

WHAT'S LEFT

In this dump the bodies rot. Beyond the ravine orange fat-fleshed poppies burst in the garbage winds and scatter to lie like pieces of skin. Cars in the dump are stripped of paint and chrome and glass and fabric, they are giant heads the birds have eaten down to skull. The rats sing hunger at night, as the leather crows in daylight do. And there is always smoke. NO BURNING says the sign. The smoke stands over the filthy gorge and the hill behind it and the pastureland that runs from the hill. There is smoke if the sky is crisp and taut, a flag snapped out by breezes. There is smoke if the air is soggy-grey as wet wool pressed to the face. The smoke can never disperse from here, something always arrests its upward collapse, and from the highest fields of thistle and powdering fencewood the smoke below makes the dump a zone of war, some place always bombed a little while past. In close the smoke smells sweet as cooking flesh and – one round road; a crater surrounded by ruts that edge into gully and final deposits; a constant mud with holes where black oiled water shivers when creatures drink – the dump is always in bloom: mustard flowers are moistened polypy hair, and long wet white things grow, and the pollen drifts that is smoke from households discarded, aflame.

I have rarely come here, to this place that serves a village and town and country shacks and half a dozen prosperous farms and many starved ones – five thousand persons' noseblown tissues and underwear smeared and sucked-at porkbones guttering. I have stayed away. I come now. In my days at the dump in my car (the motor always running, for I must get back) I see the red rusted pickups dumping cords of rotted elm and see the fires jump. I see the old man and wife pluck from the edge of the canyon wire and bedstead parts and bottles with no tops; they take pieces, rarely wholes, as if sometime, in a long enough time, everything will come here – handles now for a highboy drawer seized years ago, and maybe one year the highboy itself, without legs, and maybe some year one leg. They do not hurry, they do not speak. In long transparent raincoats unfastened, with no expression and no spoken sound, they pick up what hasn't burned. When they leave in their windowless car I am here. Others come. A girl of eighteen with the starved tight skin of a dying woman comes here in cheap brown pants to sift what the sifters have combed through and left. She leaves with nothing and her silent mouth says there is nothing everywhere, always, and I am here, sitting back in the mud in my car, away from the edge of the dump, until the green shiny flies are at my eyeballs, or until I can't breathe for the smoke. Then I leave as others do – squinting, breathing out more than in, driving in silence and looking nowhere, the dump at my back.

It is there at night. It is wreckage of hell in the dark. Frogs cry someplace near, and insects closer by chafe wings, and things in the high surrounding slippery grass make frightened sounds. The fires are bronze, they snap in the gully and flare up over the edge and make shadows twist across the slime pools, then they crawl back down. At night I turn the motor off and leave my car and walk toward the edge. The ground is like a new grave rained on, and it pulls at my ankles, my toes curl up because they have to when I walk there, and I wobble like a child who can't stay up.

I do, I stay on my feet. I cannot come to the edge. I get close, and I crunch on lightbulbs and plastic and meat that shakes with worms and paper that people have written on, but I do not come to the edge and lean out and look in. I leave garbage there, in neat green plastic bags that tie at the top with twists of colored wire. At night I bring the refuse I can find at home and throw it far from me, far from the edge I am far from, over the fires that writhe like flesh. At night I go in disguise: I'm a householder cleaning his nest. And then I stand in the smoke away from the edge and then leave. At night I leave quickly, go home to where the fires are distant and hidden and do not glow on my sky, and I smell it. Always I do. When I sleep the smoke sleeps inside my mouth.

There is more to life than that. For example, I read. I am reading *Official Detective* now. (It's *Official Detective Combined With Actual Detective*, the cover says; just to the left of the pointing breasts of the haggard girl with the gun it says

RIDDLE OF THE
LOOK-ALIKE
SOUTHWEST
MURDER
VICTIMS

and, below that,

FREDERICK BUSCH lives in upstate New York. A story collection (containing "What's Left") is shortly to be published, in England, by Calder and Boyars. Title: Breathing Trouble.

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HOMICIDE PROBERS HAD A HUNCH
HIS SLAYER
BURIED
THE NEVADA
UNDERTAKER

and her breasts aim left while her fat black gun aims right: she seems not to know where to look.)

Every story, from "Reno's Stereo Murder Case" to "Behind the Locked Door of the Ritz," is by someone who is *Special Investigator For Official Detective Stories.* None of them knows why people die. None suspects why .25 automatics "used by the mysterious gunman" are loaded in the winds of morning. No one knows why "terrified innocent churchgoers" watch a shaking slender man shoot bullets into flesh while he drools. Always there is "a known record of sexual offenses"; always someone "was known to be upset." But never is there reason for dying – only records, only numbers from a file, small histories of chance, photographs of blood on a corpse's mouth, crushed nostrils, eyes that are crossed and leaking. *Death because of death* this journal says. It is a place where bodies rot.

And the ads are for failure: "Home Import Business – Make Big Profits" and "Talent Searchers of Hollywood Ask For Your Songs." Readers can "Join Our Team of Crimefighters Annual Dues $5" or "Borrow Up to $1,000 By Mail!" Male Bikini Underwear Be As Sexy As She Is comes for three dollars and a Sturdy Attractive Checkwriter Protects to $9,999, and the magazine costs fifty cents, it carries a full-page message in the front

TO EVERY MAN AND WOMAN
IN AMERICA
LOSING HIS OR HER HAIR

and its histories of heart-stop, muscle-spasm, failures in the gland are handbook for corpses. It does not say about death.

Perhaps there is nothing to say. Perhaps after all there is nothing to say and nothing to do except pick at the bodies' little histories, or seize at the edge of the dump for fragments, and wait. But nothing comes, then, does it? Do we wait for the nothing that comes?

No one my age should be asking these questions.

No one is my age.

She would say that is pure writer's ego. She would say that no one but writers feel so unique.

I would say that everyone is unique.

She would call that bullshit and shake her head and let her lips go tight.

I would say stop chewing my throat.

She would say you couldn't say everyone if you thought that everyone was so unique. I thought that writers know about words, she would say. I thought that language was your business.

And I would say I'm out of business now.

Or I would break a chair against a wall and watch her flinch and weep.

Or I would put my face in my hands on the table and wait for her to say oh go ahead and cry, sure, no go cry and win it *that* way.

Or I or she would say why do we do this? Why do we do this?

Neither of us would reply.

Early in the day while heat is burning cold dew off the corn in a mist I walk to the post office here – one small pine-paneled room in the side of a little house: huge flag, the President pictured not meaning his smile, the two rows of boxes with locks – and I open my long narrow box to see if there is word. There is often the local *Pennysaver* with its ads for "Big Auction of Some Nice Household Goods" and "Fill Wanted" and "Standing Hay For Sale." Often the Montgomery Ward has sent its comic-book colored pictures of imitation wood and leather for nothing down and everything owed over years.

The lady in her housecoat at the small screen window there will tell me of the weather I have walked through. I'll agree and walk in it again the other way. There might be no one on the road and in that early emptiness I might look down ahead of me to noplace, really, and wonder what her letters, if she sent them, ever, might say.

I am on my back under two small men in the midst of divorce and I don't miss you. I don't miss you.

or

We've eaten each other's skin so much we've got a taste *for it now! We're cannibals! We're* killing *each other! Can I come where you're living now? Or can you find me here? What else can we do? Maybe we live by killing each other. Maybe we have to die all over each other all the time.*

or

I go to dances here. They call them Singles Nights. The horny men and the horny women pick each other up by accident of course. Everyone's skirts are too long. The women wear flowers over their left boob. I go to them. The men look at me and I look back. I don't want them looking but I look back.

or

riding into the desert, ten of us. One man in his forties (on his second divorce) rode away from the group very fast and the cowboy had to stay with us, it being the desert and all, death behind every Coke can. So we all hung around and pretty soon the cowboy started shouting "Mister Ring. Mister Ring?" And then he started shouting "Harry Ring, hello! Hello!" Then all of us started shouting "Har-ry! Har-ry!" and giggling until we couldn't shout, and after an hour we had to go back because of the heat. Harry wasn't back at dinner –

or

I know the first name of every cactus plant here and I don't feel like a stranger anyplace. I don't miss you. I don't miss you.

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But I stop. I go inside the rented house and drink more coffee and turn the television set on or don't. I list the parts of the house I hate most: the green Chinese vase made in Newark; the bookshelves with no books except one Reader's Digest Condensed Volume (three novels in three hundred pages – Mazo de la Roche, Frank Yerby, Faith Baldwin) and, on their sides, *Collier's* for all of 1956; the easy chair that smells of alien hair oil; the rust around the razor-blade slot in the medicine chest, the sense of all that other skin and blood behind the slot with the blades, owning the place though I shave there and bleed; the kitchen's mildew; the bathroom's mildew; the mildew under the floorboards and on the sheets; the time, after I have left, that this house will stand and fester onto other men who will not know that I preceded them; the infantile pencilling I've made above the antique toaster, on the soft white wall: I WAS HERE.

You're not guilty" she said. "You don't believe it but you're not guilty, it isn't your fault. He died. That's all. I'm sorry, but it's *all*: he died."

"I recall that he died" I said. "Last week. I still remember."

"Don't *fight*. I'm trying to say that you didn't kill him. Nobody dies from broken hearts and even if they do you sure didn't break his. All it was was you had trouble talking to each other. He loved you."

"Thank you. I don't need this."

"He loved you and you loved him and you know he did and he knew you did and that wasn't a *prob*lem. He was sick. He got sicker and died. You didn't do anything."

"I *know*. I know. Sweetheart, I don't want this now."

"You have to. You have to. You're not responsible for a man dying whether you could talk to each other or not. You really didn't kill him."

"I really didn't kill him. Okay."

"He was close with his emotions and he found it hard to tell you how he felt. That's all."

"So I spent a year not being with him."

"Most men your age don't stay with their fathers."

"Unless they know their fathers need them and then they do. Some. Some do."

"If they get told. If their father says I need you here."

"Maybe it wasn't his job to tell."

"Maybe it was."

"Well it wasn't. All right? It wasn't. Was not."

"Oh *shit*, you're so goddamn anxious –"

"To mourn. This is mourning."

"Thank you" she said.

I said "You know this isn't yours. You do know that? That this is mine? He was *my* father and *I* left him and *I* feel bad."

"And *I* am married to *you*. I have a right to talk to you. I have to *live* with you. Which I'm barely scraping through right now."

"Why don't you find something else?" I said. "How about something like a sleep-in with a Mormon choir or something?"

"Should I find it far away?" she said.

"As far as you like."

She said "Thank you."

I said "Yes."

She said "Thanks."

I said "I didn't start out to fight with you."

"No."

"I didn't."

"I know. We never do. We never start to fight by starting out to fight."

"Oh, no" I said. "Please. No. Not now. We absolutely can't have another Report On Our Married Life today. Not now."

"I'm sorry. I was only worried about the way we don't live together. I didn't mean to waste any time or anything. I'm sorry, I know how busy you are. Writing and all. Oh you fascinating writers."

I said "The writing's mine too. When I happen not to be writing something isn't your business. That's mine, that work."

"Or lack of it."

"It's *mine*!"

"So's the shooing kids off of the lawn? So's the setting up meals so massuh can work at his pace, just right? So's the sitting around while you go into your room and run away? Wrong. Wrong: that little bit is *mine*. So if we happen not to live a life so you can write pretty things I would like it if you'd *write* them."

"Check."

"Dammit."

"Check."

She said "What the hell is *that* supposed to mean?"

I said "It means I hear. I hear what you say. I hear it again."

"I didn't mean to repeat myself."

"Oh."

"Are you as sure of yourself as you sound?"

"No."

"I'm not either."

"I know. We never are."

"I'm pretty scared," she said.

"That we're losing each other?"

"Yes."

"We are. I think we are."

"Yes."

"That's what I mean about my father" I said. "Everyone's dying at once. He died. I'm dying. You're dying. Everything's starting to rot. Not one word I ever could have said to him would have made him believe how much I wanted him to stay. Even far away and hating me. Just stay. We never had the words. He and I had no words."

"Well *we* can find the words maybe" she said.

"To stay alive with?"

"Yes."

"We've been together long enough to know."

"What? Know what? Don't *tell* me it. Never mind."

"To know that words don't work."

"Words *are* your work, you *know* they work. Something works. We can make up *some*thing that works."

"No."

"No?"

"No."

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So I will stay here a while and listen to the house at night creak moisture in the wood. I will sneer at the Newark vase and turn the television on or off, lie on the bed in the morning and wonder, walk down to check for mail. I will come back up the road and later drive my car to the dump and watch the smoke. I will walk from my car on the grave-mud at night past pools that breathe and tremble. In the crawling fires' shadows I will stand, away from the edge. In the car going home I will follow the light-cones into insect bodies smashed and a thump of furred beast rolling under my wheels, invisible, smeared. One night I will skid the car on its brakes, and the lights wobbling up and across the woods on the black road will show me there is nothing to the left, and nothing to the right, and darkness ahead of me, darkness behind. I will turn the car and go back, knowing no direction, feeling that one way is *back*.

I will come to the dump. The car will crunch ruts, the black water where fevers breed will soak the sides of the car and droplets will drift in the window and stay on my face, like spit thick from a cold mouth. I will turn off the engine, turn off the lights. I will listen to the cooling motor tick, I will hold to the wheel. Fire will light up its smoke and in the brush around the dump the movements of small things will stop, then begin. I will hold to the wheel.

Then I will walk over grave-mud and bottles and long plastic tubing to smoke that hangs at the edge. I will come that far. I will squint at the crawling fires climbing up and move a foot, its curling toes, and move the other, and stand near the edge, on soft sacks of garbage and wrung wet paper and household goods that have snapped. I will move again and when one fisted toe is at the edge and slanting I will hang my head down and look. I will stay there and look and I will say to them who died from me in different ways "I want what's left. Whatever there is. What's left of you. I want what there is I can have. Please? Please."

Some morning after some night I'll mail my letters out, all over, some with stamps and some without, my finest fictions – words: what's left of me. Sincerely yours. Truly yours. Constantly yours. What's left is yours. □

DORI KATZ

NONE SUCH HOUSE

In my father's house there was no father. Or, my father had no house. Either one, take your pick, as long as something's missing. So, in my father's house, we ran in the corridors, slid down bannisters, looking for father. Or, coming upon father sleeping in a field, we asked him "Poppa, have you seen the house?" "Ask your mother," said the father of the house. "The house stands for mother, doesn't that school teach you anything?" But mother had locked herself in her own father's house. "No, thanks, I don't have any," she answered when people asked about children. "I have flowers, thunderbolts and little fishes, and not lawyers, lovers and suicides." We tried, we really tried. Tommy almost drowned from too much water, Cleo learned to wiggle her ears like the flowers in the field and Alexander struck everything in sight. But one of us was always hungry, the other tired and the third one cried and cried. So, we all lived together like everyone else in the none such house. Mother sang behind the locked door, there's no place like father. Father dreamed of stones, leave no stone unturned, and the children changed their mind, morning noon and night. When there was nothing left of father's house, we multiplied it by three. Junior got the window and jumped from it. Sister took the key and gave it away and I, I took to sea looking for father beating about the bush. Let sleeping dogs run deep.

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A STORY BY KAYWYNNE ADAMS

Pipe a Song about a Lamb

"Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child,
and he laughing said to me,

'Pipe a song about a Lamb';
So I piped with merry chear;
'Piper pipe that song again' –
So I piped, he wept to hear."

–William Blake

The boy was told to plant three kernels of corn in each hill. That was all.

The sun was kind. It played on the flesh of his fingers and pulled at the bones underneath. It could see everything at once, and offered him secret gifts. It rode on his back, blowing heat into his ribs, pushed deeper into his heart and was his good friend.

The sun laughed at his feet. It was a laughter heard by everything. The sun pretended to be bigger than it was, crept up on the berry patch like a great bear, growled the green straight up out of the roots, surprised the time of spring in the earth.

The boy put two or three handfuls of corn into each hill in one row and left the hills in the other rows empty. There were dark violets to be seen on the creek bank and the sun's cave arced over birds. Grass took light from the wind.

The single row of corn came up in choked clumps. The father stood a long time in the field. It was a morning without sun.

His slow rage changed everything into a black and white photograph. It was the way he saw things often, but the mother and the boy did not know what he saw. They sensed a danger from which it was not possible to hide. The danger was deep in their lives.

The mother let the skillet of grease burn while she allowed herself to be beaten. Afterward, she bandaged her face, saying nothing.

He left the house and waited by the corn with his belt in his hand. There was blood on his shirt sleeve. The boy coming home saw him engraved on the berry patch like the nickel buffalo.

The father saw the boy coming out of the map of the world toward the black and white photograph of his life. The mother stood on the porch sucking her fist and watching the boy out of a time she remembered.

The father pointed at the corn and threw the boy to the ground. The mother crouched on the step, biting blood from her arm. The father beat the boy until he was unconscious and dragged him into the corner of the photograph. He threw him into the storm cellar in the side of the hill and bolted the door.

The boy's cheek rested on an old potato, on its knotty, white sprouts and soft wrinkles. Its odor was of wet dust. It pressed against his left nostril, closing the passage. He felt a ball of chill air in his right nostril and sucked it down into his lungs. He knew that he had bled a great deal. There were humps of broken flesh on his head and face. His eyes were sealed with dried blood. He did not know where he was. He could not remember who he was. There was a terrible weight that hurt his body with more pain than he could understand. He passed, again, into unconsciousness.

In the black and white house, the father ate bean soup and listened to the radio. He rolled his own cigarette and propped his feet on the oven door.

The mother sat at the table staring into the coal-oil lamp. Wind rattled through cracks in the floor. She heard a rat scratching in the wall. She had no thoughts. She had, instead, a small collection of colored pictures he knew nothing about. She had forgotten the use of words. She jerked violently. She was afraid he would notice her pictures, but he went on smoking and hee hawing Jack Benny. The laughter of the world floated out of the radio and stayed in the kitchen shadows. Jack Benny would be something like the Government Man. Quite suddenly, she had clear pictures of Jack and the Government Man, and of herself. She had a picture of the Kingdom of God, and one of small lambs in snow. She said something aloud and jumped up, knocking the lamp over. The glass chimney shattered on the oil cloth. She ran up to the woods and hid in a place he couldn't find. The picture of herself unbolting the cellar door began to take shape. She remembered many words.

She had already unbolted the door when he came from behind with a sledge hammer. In the instant before he took her life, she understood everything.

The boy knew that the woman was gone. He did not remember that she had been his mother. He did not ask the man. Something inside instructed him concerning the man. Together they listened to Jack Benny on the radio. He knew that to laugh when the man laughed meant safety. The man gave him food. The boy thought of little animals getting warm in the sun, their eyes hurting with light. He began to understand that he had once been able to see.

The man went, often, to stand alone in the corn field between the map of the world and the black and white photograph of his life. Sometimes people came to the edge of the map. They were many-colored and could not come across. □

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JACK MYERS

AN OLD STORY FOR MY THREE-YEAR-OLD SON

To calm you down we let you tear off
great chunks of sleep. The iron settles
in your waterglass, the small bubbles bear
weightlessness to the light and a dead-end
sign is posted in the street. We try hard
to keep your beautiful small face oblivious
to the roomful of Viennese observers chanting
penis, cosmos, power, cancer, kiss until
the white noise, that scream of yours, breaks
the driest voice among us to its knees.

We understand so much. The closed door,
the windy punishments and rewards pour from
wrinkled grab-bags, these hands I've trained
your eyes on. Near the end of my defeat
I'll tell you how they sent a few sad hoofbeats
on the roof that changed positions like my debts,
all back and legs with no head. How I climbed
on top of this blue shivering rag, splitting
my sides from the annual bad joke, my job,
grubbing through ashes and bricks, lonely,
freezing, driven crazy by helpers. How even
the grass flew in its place to keep you green.
My folks gave me a recording of their screams.
It is so perfect it is why I guard your sleep.

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A Story by Mary Clearman

The Reining Pattern

They attended the county horse show religiously, all the ranchers with gumbo still plastered to their boots and unpaid bills jammed in the jockey boxes of the pickups and station wagons and even Cadillacs that they parked in a circle around the race track. The townspeople, store owners, and the smattering of professional men and their families never came. The yearly ritual had nothing to do with them. They were uncomfortable about the whole show, nursing their own precarious sophistication and pretending that nothing was taking place beyond the city limits.

But the ranchers, whether they owned a mortgaged hundred and sixty acres, or a mortgaged ten thousand, drove their pickups into a circle around the county race track like Conestoga wagons drawn up against Indian attack, unloaded their horses, and watched one another go through the familiar drills and patterns. Each stylized movement was as jealously observed as the faith of their fathers.

The events – the cattle cutting, the breakaway roping, the fine reining – were anachronistic, designed by the grandfathers of the present contestants to show off the skills of working cowhorses and their own day-to-day life. Not even the big spreads worked cattle like that any more, although they sometimes pretended to. Nowadays they cut out a few yearlings every summer and fed them hay so that the kids could practice cow cutting. Ironically, the new strains of quarter horse and thoroughbred in the old mustang stock had developed a leggy, nervous breed that was far superior to the old working cowhorses. These new horses were trim and fast, agile as giant cats, and lived to compete in honor of a culture that had never quite existed.

Johnnie MacReady's four-year-old mare, for example. Johnnie and her father had trained her from a colt, groomed and fussed over her, and been jubilant together when she had taken best prospective stock horse three years ago. Since then, Johnnie had been working toward the advanced reining competition, the final and most prestigious event in the county horse show, and she had a mare that would have prompted her grandfather, fifty years dead but a top hand from Texas to Canada in his time, to have offered up his whole saddle string in trade.

Now at ten in the morning, as the wind brought the odor of cotton candy over the trampled grass of the fair grounds, Johnnie was passing up the pleasure horse classes and grooming her mare in the shade of the horse barns. She ran the sponge of warm water over the beautiful throughbred legs, and the mare turned and nipped at Johnnie's cropped hair.

"You're easy enough now," Johnnie growled, freeing her hair. The mare looked around at her comically. By afternoon, Johnnie knew, she would have all she could do to keep the mare's competition spirits under control.

The mare's head shot up, jolting Johnnie against the water bucket. "What the hell –"

"Take it easy. It's just me." Marty Croyland sat down opposite Johnnie on an upended barrel, stretched his bow legs out, and began to roll a cigarette. Johnnie glared at him.

"Could of give me some warning." She stood up and wiped her hands on the thighs of her Levi's, new for the occasion. Sweat beads were furrowing down her sunburned face. "Christ, she would have to go and roll this morning."

"She looks all right," Marty reassured her.

"You're not supposed to smoke in the barns."

"I'm outside."

Marty had, indeed, dug a little bare spot with the toe of his boot, Johnnie saw.

Marty was slim, just taller in his exaggerated boot heels than Johnnie. His faded blue jeans were skin tight, making him look more fragile than he was, but Johnnie knew from experience that Marty was one person she could not bully. Turning her back on him, she picked up a curry comb and set to work on the mare's long black tail.

"How's your dad? Hand still bothering him?"

"Yeah, he can't do nothing."

"I talked to Jake," said Marty.

Johnnie stopped combing. "When?"

"This morning, like I said, remember?"

"I remember."

"He's going to need a man to run that lower spread of his, down on the river. There's a house down there, and Jake'll supply groceries."

The curry comb resumed motion. There were few enough jobs that a cowboy could get and support a wife, she knew. "You gonna take it?"

"Well –" Marty's voice dwindled. He propped his cigarette carefully on his knee, and took off his hat. From where she stood, Johnnie could see the thinning patches of his sweat-dampened hair. Marty was ten years older than she was. Boys her own age sickened her. "Might beat forty a month from Dad," Marty finished.

"That keeps you in gas and beer."

"Yeah, well, I might want more than that."

Johnnie turned back to the bucket and dropped the sponge in the now clammy water. She dried her hands on

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the tail of her shirt, and looked down at the tiny diamond on her fourth finger. The little stone looked dainty and foreign on Johnnie's hand, sunburned and scarred, with torn and bitten fingernails. Like something some town girl might wear, thought Johnnie. Like her cousin Donna.

At least Johnnie was no sissy town girl to fuss around with hand lotion, she told herself, and shoved her shirt tail back into her Levi's. Marty was going to expect her to marry him, a small voice whispered. "Money isn't everything," she told him.

"No."

Johnnie scowled at the sun. "Well – I suppose that way, we could get married this fall," she began.

"Yeah, well, that's what I thought."

The faint wind between the horse barns increased, rattling a beer can into the weeds, and driving a scrap of tinfoil into a clump of dusty crested wheat grass. From the far side of the barns came the electronic garble of the loudspeaker. Johnnie wondered how far they'd come with the pleasure events. She hoped the wind wouldn't pick up by afternoon.

"That's great," she told Marty slowly.

He stubbed out his cigarette. "I'll see Jake again this afternoon."

The mare's ears pricked, and Johnnie turned. Her mother was crossing the stretch of faded grass between the barns and the parked circle of cars and trucks, a picnic basket over one arm.

"I'm not hungry," Johnnie shouted. She knew she was getting nervous, and despised her weakness.

"You better eat something. Marty, tell her." Johnnie's mother, a massive woman with perpetually short breath, tugged her print dress down around her thick midsection. "We're gonna have lunch over there, under the trees by the road. You two come along."

Johnnie's lip thrust out. "I ain't hungry!"

"Marty," appealed her mother. "Seems like you're the only one, outside her dad, can make her see sense."

"You better eat," Marty advised. "You'll just get more jitters if you don't."

"Don't have jitters."

"You don't have to worry about your figure," her mother joshed her. "Not like me."

That, at least, was true. Johnnie was built like a sixteen-year-old boy, breastless and hipless, with long thin arms and legs. Her straw-colored hair was cropped short, and her peeling skin was bare of makeup. Some women, even ranch women, fussed with their hair and hands and duded themselves up, instead of getting out and putting in a day's work, but Johnnie had always been enough her father's girl, anxious enough to keep his comfortable approval, to deny any betraying yearnings after femininity.

Her mother was thinking something of the same kind. "Seen Donna this morning," she remarked. "Should of seen her – all gussied up. She thinks she's somebody."

Johnnie considered her cousin Donna, her mind momentarily distracted from the coming competition. "Donna's a damn dude."

"She's getting to be one, that's for sure." Johnnie's mother shifted the picnic basket on her substantial forearm. "Her mother ought to put her to work out on some ranch. Titters, carries on, enough to make you sick. Thank God you were never boy crazy."

"If Donna'd ever do a day's work it'd kill her."

"Says she's gonna be an airline stewardess."

Johnnie sneered. "Her?"

"Thought that'd get you."

"Donna's pretty enough," said Marty peaceably.

Neither woman paid any attention to this irrelevancy, but gazed together out across the grass, past the race course and over the barren foothills beyond, up to the mountains that rose up in the blue distance and closed in their world. Enough world for Johnnie, who remembered the stories of the grandfather who had been a top hand and respected through the whole American West. And his father before him, homesteader and Indian fighter. Even now, with power wires crisscrossing the sky and the faint hum of traffic from the state highway, Johnnie could imagine how it must have been.

A faraway drone attracted her attention, and after a moment she saw the glint of silver against the blue sky. A big airliner headed for Spokane. Johnnie thought to Donna's plans, and sneered again. Donna making a big fuss over high school graduation, Donna and her big ideas about airline school, business school, Donna and her frightening softness that Johnnie dreaded as quicksand.

Johnnie had worked four years toward the reining pattern, drudging away in the hot sun while Donna and girls like her had fun. This was world enough for her, she thought again, and hoped violently that the grandfather she had never seen would have approved of her.

Johnnie ate lunch after all, trying to make her stomach stop turning. She squatted under an aspen and gnawed on a chicken breast while Marty told her mother and father about Jake's offer. Marty and her father fell into a discussion of grass yields, how much Jake's calves had weighed at auction last fall, how much hay he had sold off the river meadows. Marty elicited none of the stiff-legged hostility from Johnnie's father that he had shown to the one or two ranch boys who had previously come sniffing around Johnnie. Hipshot and gnarled himself, he seemed to accept Marty and his unhealed collection of wounds from his brief bronc-riding career.

"I never thought you'd want any of that lovey-dovey nonsense," Johnnie's mother told her. Then she asked anxiously, "You're not gonna get married this fall, are you?"

Johnnie shrugged. "Don't know." Marty was watching her out of the corner of his eye.

"Marty," said Johnnie's mother, breathing heavily, "what's your dad gonna do? He can't run that place of his without help, and with the price of hired help the way it is –"

"I dunno," said Marty. "I don't know if he can make out alone, but still that place won't support two families."

"Well, you can't just leave him in the lurch, not this fall."

"It's a damn shame," began Johnnie's father, stretching back oratorically from his meal, "it's a damn shame there ain't no way a young man can support a family on the land

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any more." He glared around the little group. "By God, it used to be, maybe we didn't have so much, that was back in the 'thirties, but seemed like we got along all right. No electric bill, because we didn't have no electricity, no gas bill to speak of, just a little hay to winter the work teams —"

"Well, I sure wish you two could plan on gettin' married this fall," finished Johnnie's mother. "One thing, you're neither of you like some folks, thinking about nonsense all the time so's you can't wait."

"— No goddamn tractor repairs. Whole country's gone to machinery, hard to believe time's gone by like it has. And here's Johnnie just a kid still —"

Cries of greeting behind them made them all turn. Johnnie's uncle strode up to the little group, beaming over his embroidered Western-style shirt and dogger tie. Johnnie's father struggled to his feet, his infected hand to his stiff back, and Johnnie, seeing her aunt and the despised Donna straggling behind, threw her chicken breast into the weeds. Nervous as she was, and then have to put up with that bitch.

The men were shaking hands. If they had once shared a family resemblance, it was gone now. Johnnie's uncle had grown up on the old ranch, but the depression had sent him into a job in the county land office, where he had grown comfortable. Afraid of getting his hands dirty, as Johnnie's mother often said.

Her mother was turning to the women now, beaming falsely. "You all set for school this fall?" she asked Donna.

"It doesn't get started for another month," explained Donna.

"She's really looking forward to living in Spokane," Donna's mother rattled. Johnnie writhed. Prissy, butter-mouthed Donna. She could remember when Donna liked to get out and ride with the best of them. Not any more. Johnnie's resentful eyes moved over her cousin's blonde bob, her eyes set too close together, the sandals that exposed pink-painted toenails. Donna smiled at her, and Johnnie turned up the corners of her mouth unwillingly, wondering if Donna was making fun of her. The bitch. Bet she liked the boys to slobber over her.

"Johnnie thought about goin' on to school two years ago," Johnnie's mother was running on.

"Like hell," Johnnie growled. "I don't need no phony school to teach me what I want to know."

"When are you going to get married?" her aunt asked her.

"They'd like to get married this fall, but it don't look like they can," Johnnie's mother hurried. "Marty's father can't spare him, and you know the size of that place of his. Not big enough for two families."

Her aunt was clucking, commiserating.

"Maybe in another year, things'll look better," her mother went on. "One thing about Johnnie, she's in no killin' hurry. Don't know what her dad would do without her. She's always been his girl. Or boy. They just keep me around the place to cook."

Johnnie's father had caught the last of that. "Shame there ain't no way a young man can support a family on the land these days," he began again, lecturing his brother, who squirmed. "God damn it, they got you comin' and goin' —"

"There's jobs to be had —"

"In town, maybe. All right for some city guy."

"Donna and me, we're gonna take in the canning exhibits," said Johnnie's aunt. "Why don't you two come along? Wilma, Johnnie?"

"Well —" began her mother. Johnnie sprang up. The jitters were worse than they had been all morning.

"Christ! I ain't gonna waste no time on any goddamn canning exhibit!"

She strode off, liking the grate of her new Levi's rubbing thigh-to-thigh and her mother's nervous explanation: "Johnnie's got to see to her horse, she's riding in the reining competition this afternoon, and her dad ain't been able to help, what with his hand —"

Marty found her down at the barns. "Feel any better?"

Her hands were shaking, and she gnawed a nail. "I don't care! That dirty little bitch!" Johnnie wiped her forehead with the back of her arm, leaving a dirty streak and several strands of hair standing straight up. "What makes me the maddest is, she's my own cousin. And she don't have any more feel for what's important than — than some city dude. Thinks she's so smart. She just wants to get laid. Pink toenails! You notice that?"

"Well —" Marty mused a moment, taking off his hat and letting the breeze pick at the thin strands of hair. "Her folks brought her up to have things. Clothes, you know, make-up. Junk like that. She's just what she thinks she ought to be."

Johnnie sniffed hard. Her eyes were filling with tears that welled incongruously in the boyish face. "She's just like the rest of them girls I had to go to high school with. Shameless hussies!" Johnnie, who had been inside a church perhaps twice in her life, ended her jeremiad.

Marty looked at his pocket watch. "You know it's two o'clock?"

"Jesus, is it?"

Knuckling her tears away, Johnnie led out the mare and threw the saddle blanket across her back. The mare sidestepped, and the blanket hung crookedly. "God damn it, look at her!" The tears were flowing again.

"Calm down," Marty advised. "She's pickin' it up from you."

In the end, Marty, limping slightly from the leg that he had smashed up in the saddle bronc riding three years ago, saddled and bridled the mare, checked the stirrups and cinch, and led her up and down while Johnnie cried in the shade.

"Think you can take her now?"

"I've got to!"

"You really want to win this, don't you?" Marty's expression was odd.

"More than anything!" Johnnie sobbed again, her face contracted. "I've been training for four years —"

Her father stumped around the end of the barn. "Bring her up, Johnnie, they're callin' for the reining class now."

Johnnie snatched the reins from Marty's hand and slung them over the mare's neck. The mare turned and butted at her in play, and Johnnie yelped.

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"What the hell did Donna do that worked her up like this?" Johnnie's father asked Marty. "Johnnie's just a kid, bawls buckets like that –"

Marty shrugged. "Here," he told Johnnie. "Get your reins gathered up, and quit your bawling, and get on."

Johnnie glared at him through swimming eyes, but obeyed. Her ungainly body swung up on the mare, and suddenly became graceful. Nudging the mare with a spur, she moved off on a trot toward the arena.

"She sure can ride," said her father to Marty.

"She sure can."

Once on the horse, with the powerful muscles rippling between her legs, Johnnie's tears dried. She rode with a faintly Indian look, slouched in the saddle, long legs making her a part of the mare. The wind streaked her cropped hair, and passing ranch folk turned to stare at her. Johnnie joined the other contestants in line in the arena, feeling the sun on her back, and sparing a thought for Marty, who was so patient and treated her like a decent person. Not like some of those boys, like her mother said, with their minds on nonsense all the time.

She sat her mare in line, watching the other riders go through their drill in honor of the form of ancestor worship they had all chosen, the intricate series of figure eights and cloverleaf turns, watching for the little failures that the judge ought to catch. A hard-mouthed sorrel gelding that widened the circles and refused to back on command, a little roan that wouldn't change leads.

Then Johnnie was spurring her mare and cantering into the hard-packed arena, seeing her parents and Marty watching from the hood of Marty's old pickup, the white of her father's bandaged hand raised. The wind had risen, puffing dust into her eyes and making the flag stream from the pole in the center of the race course. That, too, was as it should be. The wind brought the odor of sweat and horses, the faint gasoline smell from the parked cars, and a tang of its own. It was the horse show smell; she had smelled it every year from babyhood.

She could feel the mare's mouth on the bit as she lifted the reins and began the wide canter in the largest of the figure eights. The mare's gait was even, and Johnnie's body moved with the roll, like a dancer's, shifted from one stirrup to the other on the outer edges of the circles to make the mare change leads.

A ripple from the circle of spectators told her that she had ridden a perfect figure eight. Johnnie's hands were steady on the reins now, and she tasted dried salt tears on her lips as she gathered the mare for the second of the large figure eights. Around and around, change leads, around, and then around again; that was it. Johnnie's lips were moving like a votary's as her body dipped and shifted almost with the rippling stars and stripes above her, carrying the mare through another perfect course. The reins barely touched the satin neck; Johnnie's knees and shifting weight did the directing.

Now the small figure eights, so tight that the mare had barely enough room to turn, and yet must hold her canter or be disqualified. Johnnie choked up on her reins and pressed in with the spurs.

"Ohhhhh!" It was a long murmur, drawn from the crowd by the mare's perfect rhythmic canter, around in the short circle, lead change, then around again.

Once more. Johnnie's breath was coming evenly. She was barely aware of the wind blowing dust through her hair. Thank God she had no breasts to jounce – one more time.

"Ohhhh!"

Again the unbroken canter in a circle barely big enough to maneuver around, the change of leads in cramped space, the repeat around to the center of the figure eight. Johnnie halted the mare on cue, breathed hard, and face the judge.

A nudge of the spurs, and three paces ahead. Then three paces directly back, Johnnie's mare not fighting the bit, but moving backwards as placidly as if it were her natural direction. As it nearly was, considering the hours Johnnie had spent on those reining patterns, over and over again in the corral until her lips were bitten raw and windchapped.

Back up. Pivot right, pivot left. Most horses hated to pivot.

Not the hardest part. The sidestep. Johnnie hesitated a fraction after the last pivot, her eyes on the mountains above the circle of cars, and what was almost a prayer on her lips. *Grandfather, let her sidestep, don't let her break forward. Please, Grandfather.*

She picked up the reins from the mare's neck. Let her sidestep, I've been a good girl. Four years, and no nonsense, and after all, it's all I want.

Careful. Too much pressure one way or the other, and the mare would go forwards or backwards. Or turn. Now. The reins against the mare's neck, a series of little jerks, the spurs, lean far out to the side – there.

Daintily, lifting her feet high as if in distaste for the unnatural exercise forced upon her, the mare stepped sideways like a crab, hesitating at first, then moving with much more assurance sideways across the arena.

Another ripple of applause, growing louder, and Johnnie let out her breath. "Thanks," she whispered to some unknown ear. Easily then she rode the mare back to her place in line to watch the last two contestants. Marty was smiling at her from across the arena, but she did not look at him. *Not marriage*, Johnnie thought, *not stupid marriage after this.* She had won, she knew.

When they gave her the blue ribbon, she was thinking that her mother would suppose that she had won her over by argument. *But it isn't that, Grandfather*, she told herself.

Marty knew.

"Told Jake I couldn't leave Dad alone," he explained that evening in her father's kitchen.

Johnnie nodded, relieved. "Maybe next year." □

MARY CLEARMAN's story "Lambing Out" [Summer 1970] is included in the 1972 O. Henry collection, forthcoming from Doubleday. The author teaches at Northern Montana.

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D. L. W. SMITH

FAMILY DIALOGUE

from Living Anywhere: Second Generation

This new life is a seizure tilted
of the mind for instance my non-
violent father tells me today at
breakfast that fish are strange ani-
mals that they are cold and scaly
and brittle to the touch because they
choose their food with great and odd and
ludicrous care bordering on the sublime

(my father has looked for
himself everywhere)

my mother has observed the earth stinks
like a molded orange and does not like her
furniture I have told her we are not ones who
can live anywhere
"cold potatoes in the closet string of
cigarettes in the air the whole slows in
its movement balancing precariously there! the
thickened pulp of world sticks out everywhere
it is *vulgar* to the touch, daughter, why is
nothing ever quite like home?"

again at five
my father arrives

"the silken fish yield up their eyes
their golden columns split the earth
has taken to lightning purpose only
the swiftness of our children will be left"

I would like to see
my entire family
tipped into silence
like the wind massed jagged
against these gaunt houses

my father has looked
for himself everywhere

my mother has touched my broken quick
with her mind

my life is an oblique seizure
of their minds a dark silence in the
flesh coming soon to be born

I do not know how to tell
them I am I am.

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Daphne, Going to Radcliffe

A STORY BY ERLENE HUBLY

Her mother does not come right out and say it, does not put it in so many words, but it is because the girl, after four years of the bestcollege, after four years of dating the bestboys, is still unmarried, that it is such a good idea for her to go.

AND A GIRL WITH *YOUR* LOOKS, she smiles. THE GIRLS IN THE EAST MAY BE SMART, BUT I HAVE YET TO SEE ONE THAT IS . . .

The girl becomes uneasy.

WHO COULD HOLD A CANDLE TO . . . .

The girl stands before her father, who is in the attic with his soldiers.

"If Jackson had just told Beauregard to go to hell," he begins, pointing to a miniature river bed that he has constructed out of papier-mâché, "he could have pushed along here toward the Junction – and routed them all the way into the Capital!"

She tells him of Radcliffe.

"And we could have won before the war was *four months old!*"

She repeats the word. Radcliffe.

He finally hears her. "Yankees," he warns.

Her mother is not as cautious: AND WITH M. I. T. JUST DOWN THE ROAD.

The girl, still uneasy, has not yet heard the words she is listening for, and as she packs she thinks not of M. I. T., or, more relevantly, of the Fogg Art Museum. She only looks at her luggage and notes how the interior cobalt blue lining does not match the exterior prussian blue cover; she cannot think past the airport.

Only her grandmother, rinsing out her money every night in soapsuds and ammonia so that it will be clean for the next day's use, surrounded by the pictures of her children and grandchildren – pictures that are somehow more meaningful to her than the live subjects ever were, complaining that her furniture is getting smaller, that last night her favorite chair got so small that it actually disappeared from the room, sitting in front of the television set watching Walter Cronkite and thinking that he is her dead husband and with the volume down low talking to Walter, her husband, and telling him of the love she was never able to feel while he was alive, who, watching Walter when the news comes on and she sees the Negroes rioting, their blackmouths open and screaming at her, calls her only son, who is in the attic with his soldiers, and tells him that some colored people have gotten loose in her frontyard, their blackmouths open and screaming at her, and that they are going to kill her if he does not come over right away – only her grandmother can suspect what will happen to her.

The girl's mother, not-knowing, yet instinctive, warns her again as she leaves: AND WITH THE BUSINESS SCHOOL JUST ACROSS THE RIVER.

She is not famous, only representative, but the reporters are there anyway, and it is one of those almost-fateful moments that life for the beautiful is so nearly-full of, when, with just the slightest shift in the angle of her face, a photographer might have seen something that no one else had seen before, and taken a picture of it – when, prodded by just the right question, she might have uttered an answer that would make her quoted, famed:

"Excited," she answers.

"And a little nervous."

She passes the boy and thinks how he must go to Harvard – the green book bag and all – and he looks so casual, so as-if he belongs in the jeans and sandals with the book bag slung over his shoulder that she breathes deeply, taking in the bright blue autumn sky, the Square in front of her, the spire of the church beyond in the Yard, and thinks: I am at Harvard, Harvard, it is all so wonderful!

Harvard.

He is not used to this book bag business, would rather be carrying his books down on his hip, high school style, but passes the girl and says to hell with it, I've already put out a buck sixty-nine for the thing. Slinging the bag up over his shoulder, feeling the books cut into his back, he wonders if that is the best way – the bag over his shoulder, or do they carry them down at their side, letting the bag swing freely?

Her beauty affects them in this way:

A retired professor-emeritus who has spent the last four years in Widener Library, studying the Shakespeare-sonnet problem, looks up as her plane lands at Logan.

ERLENE HUBLY has published fiction in COLORADO QUARTERLY and other magazines. She is working on her doctorate at the University of Oregon.

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An undergraduate, coming out of the Coop, pauses, and answers the reporter's question: "Well, it's not exactly the *purest* kind of beauty – I mean, she doesn't have that thin, finely sculptured nose – with the nostrils suddenly flaring out, sort of sensual-like – that is *so essential.* It's more a wholesome look – faintly Mid-western, I'd say. Sort of like you've seen her before in those skiing ads where the girl comes skimming down through a pile of snow on her Head skis with her face all flushed and smiling – and you know she's eaten a good breakfast – like Cream of Wheat or something . . . ."

A photographer takes a picture of her on the steps of Kresge with the Vice-President of S & H Green Stamps who has come to Harvard to give a lecture at the Business School. The Vice-President thanks her for posing and then gives her one hundred free stamps.

An aging spinster-librarian, coming out of Lamont at dusk, pauses, sees her, sighs, and thinks of her long-past and beautiful girlhood.

The room is dark and he has taken great care to lock the door because he lives in an apartment with three other boys and they have just come from dancing mid-'forties style where the holding is more important than the music and so he wastes no time but leads her to the bed where she sits down and takes off her clothes because she remembers vaguely that this is how it is supposed to begin and he begins by feeling her breasts, gently reaching down and kissing them and then brushing up onto her lips where he kisses her long and she feels him getting larger beside her she reaches for him her eyelids closing and he in his soft Southern accent asks her what have you got there and she barely knows but thinks Father would like him because he played football and was All-Southeast and is Southern and had a great-uncle who had been one of the ones who had held Johnston's head as he lay dying at Shiloh but she knows enough to run her fingers along it and he turns and slowly moves on top of her and she thinks Mother would like him because he goes to Harvard and is a third year law student and Harvard law students have been known to make $30,000 only five years out of law school and he begins to spread her legs apart, gently with his knees then rocking back and forth slowly and she remembers that just last week in *Time* she had read where one Harvard law student (or was he from Yale?) had been offered *upon graduation* a job in New York breaking up monopolies for $50,000 a year and he reaches down with his fingers and finds her and begins to touch her slowly at first plus a percentage of whatever trusts he could break up – which would come to about $30,000 a year more and she feels uneasy with his hand there but he keeps moving his fingers faster by now but that he had finally turned the whole deal down because he didn't want to live in New York and now his body is ready and pushing hard against her, and suddenly she realizes what he is trying to do and pushes him away and he can no longer find her but asks not even in the backseat after a dance with someone you thought you loved? She says no and he sighs and sits up and they both dress and go out of the now unlocked room into the kitchen where he offers her a cookie that his mother has baked and sent from home and she sighs and thinks why always the food offering afterwards as if it righted the wrong, made everything seem all right?

Her mother, not-knowing, yet instinctive, is worried about her and writes: YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW THE *LATEST:* BRUCE TORLOFF (SP?) – DIDN'T YOU USED TO DATE HIM? WELL, HE'S BEEN APPOINTED A SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE GOVERNOR AND HEAVEN ONLY KNOWS HOW HE GOT THE JOB – WITH NO SPECIAL TRAINING OR ANYTHING: WHO WOULD HAVE EVER THOUGHT IT OF HIM? EVEN WHEN *PRESSED* ALL I CAN REMEMBER OF HIM IS THAT HE WAS ALWAYS FALLING ALL OVER HIMSELF – AND, OF COURSE, THE NIGHT THAT OLD BEAT-UP CAR OF HIS CAUGHT ON FIRE IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE – AND WITH YOU IN IT AND ALL. AND I HEAR THAT MARGUERITE DUNHAM – WASN'T SHE A YEAR BEHIND YOU – IS GOING TO MARRY A BOY FROM *STANFORD.* HOW SHE MET HIM I'LL NEVER KNOW BUT I GUESS IF YOU ARE RICH ENOUGH, AND THE DUNHAMS CERTAINLY *ARE,* YOU CAN MEET A MAN *ANYWHERE.* HE IS POOR BUT HAS "PROSPECTS" – WHATEVER THAT OLD CLICHE MEANS . . . WE HAVE NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT MUCH, AND CERTAINLY YOU HAVE YOUR OWN LIFE TO LEAD AND I KNOW "THINGS ARE DIFFERENT *NOW* FROM WHEN *I* WAS GROWING UP," ETC. BUT JUST BE CAREFUL AND REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE PLAYING WITH FIRE – ESPECIALLY SO FAR AWAY FROM HOME AND FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD ABOUT NORTHERN (OR ARE THEY 'EASTERN'?) MEN.

They are sitting along the bank of the Charles and it is one of those last-days of fall when the cold is almost-here, yet the sun is still everywhere, glinting off the dome of the Business School across the River and she is liking him, really liking him, his soft way of putting things, his seriousness, when it comes out that he is a Catholic and she catches herself, is still in control when he says it, says he is against birth control and she says you don't really *believe* that, do you; you *are* an *American* Catholic? He says that it is against the natural scheme of things – that nature does not inhibit life and she says but that's what civilization is all about – altering nature: what would happen if I never brushed my teeth? I mean it isn't really *natural* to brush your teeth and he says that there should be a reverence, a certain sacredness when two people make love and she says it can also be done just for the sheer *pleasure* of it, to express joy, happiness and he says that it's like anything done in excess: it loses its meaning.

She thinks he is a Protestant although she's not quite sure – his hair is dark and his name is Myers – she thinks it is "Myers" but if it is "Meyers" then he may be Jewish and they are sitting in front of the graduate dorm in his car and he tells her that he is an orphan and that his first experiences were with a much-older woman, he was only sixteen, a maid – white of course, who made up beds in the resort hotel where he worked that summer – and that he

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almost ended up falling in love with her, she really knew how it was, and he keeps on talking about the woman and after a while it doesn't matter anymore – whether his name is Myers or Meyers.

They meet at a cocktail party and it is the first time she has had a Manhattan and he tells her he has already gotten his law degree and she thinks the only part of the drink she really likes is the cherry and that he is now enrolled in the Business School – he will become a corporation lawyer and she smiles and says *two* graduate degrees? He says why eat hamburger when you can have steak and she wonders are *all* the boys in the Business School *this* superficial, *this* interested in money?

They are walking across the Yard and it is beginning to snow and she turns and sees that the flakes are brushing against his face, spilling down onto his eyelashes and she thinks those eyelashes, those beautiful eyelashes and then he says but I almost didn't get in – I was on their *third* waiting list and they kept me hanging there all summer. Then they reach the iron gate that leads out onto the Square and she thinks that maybe he isn't so handsome after all.

He is almost-an-ophthalmologist – only one more year of med school, and they go down to New York to see a play and all the way down he asks will you be my girl will you be my girl? He is amazed when they get to the hotel that she wants separate rooms and later after the play he says you weren't kidding, were you? you *really* weren't kidding! Then he laughs and says wait till the fellows hear about this.

The boy at the party is drunk and laughing and no one is taking him very seriously and someone says that Al Capp is in the crowd, autographing the bottoms of people's bare feet but the boy wants to be taken seriously so he climbs on a chair and blows an imaginary trumpet and the people turn and look at him and then he begins, drunk yet laughing:

"Surveys taken have shown that people of the lower-class like to make love in complete darkness – while those of the upper-middle and upper classes like some kind of light on."

He extends his arm, finger pointed out and spins himself around and around on the chair and then he sees her in the crowd looking up at him and stops his arm, finger pointing at her:

"Which do *you* prefer?"

She cannot think what to answer.

P.S. THANKS FOR THE PICTURE OF YOU AND THE GREEN-STAMP MAN (WHAT'LL THEY THINK OF NEXT?) YOU ARE AS PRETTY AS EVER – HE, I THINK, NOT SO. BUT YOU AREN'T PUTTING ON ANY WEIGHT, ARE YOU? *I CERTAINLY HOPE NOT.* YOUR FATHER AND I HAD TO LAUGH: DID HE REALLY GIVE YOU A HUNDRED FREE STAMPS?

She thinks that it shouldn't happen this way but that it will happen this way, her taking the final-boy finally home and her father will be there at the airport in the Cadillac that he has wanted all his life and is now just-able to afford and there won't be a band there but her mother will be, looking loud enough to be one – loud-looking and ready-to-judge. And either his legs will be too short or his hair too long or his cleverness will be taken for arrogance or his quietness for homicidal tendencies or his thinness for latent tuberculosis or his plumpness for potential heart trouble and *is there something the matter with his left eye?*

"And what do you do?" her mother will ask, as they all get into the Cadillac.

Her mother writes: IS SOMETHING THE MATTER? WE SEEM TO HAVE LOST TOUCH.

He is getting a Ph.D. in Pharmacy at Boston University and she is not so sure about that but when they come outside, move toward his car, she begins to relax a little. They get into the car and begin driving and he says I like that perfume you are wearing and she says not perfume, body powder, Estée Lauder, I don't like perfume. She looks at the leathered dash and wonders how he can afford such an expensive car when he is still just a graduate student and then she catches herself: HER MOTHER'S VOICE, and realizes what she has just done, YET COMING OUT OF HER, and knows that she can no longer blame only them: that the voice INSIDE HER OWN MIND has become as loud as her parents' ever was.

On their first date he says he likes to camp out and has some kind of crazy dream of doing it someday with his kids – as soon as he has some, you know, getting a tent and going out beside some lake. On the second date he says I'm glad you're from the South too because being with you reminds me of home and she knows it won't be long now and so she remembers her mother's kitchen and her mother cooking there night after night and she remembers her mother's kitchen where the maid cooked there night after night so that her parents could go out for dinner, could have people in for dinner, would be free to leave right after dinner for a night on the town – and she knows it won't be long now and that she will have to tell the boy no because it is all too easy; she is afraid because it is all too hard.

They have been eating at Durgin-Park and are almost through, are on the Indian pudding, and the woman across the communal table has been telling them all the story about the old grounds-keeper of Granary Burying Grounds who was "at best, rather diabolical – at worst, an artist. Of sorts," she laughs.

"The headstones – all mixed up according to size, tall ones right next to small ones – offended his aesthetic sensibilities," the woman goes on. "So over a period of months, he set about to rearrange them according to size – replanting them in rows, starting with the largest and working down to the smallest. So that today," the woman laughs, "no one is really buried where the stone says he is."

The girl loves the story and laughs and as she is finishing her pudding she thinks: now *there* is a man I would really like to have known.

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Her father, who has changed, who is not this night sitting in the attic with his soldiers, writes back: "You speak of going down to New York and of seeing two plays in one day and of all the 'intelligent comments' you overheard from the audience during the intermission. And of the cab-driver who was working on his Ph.D. in linguistics and who was able to tell you how to say 'thank you' in Esperanto.

"It does not seem to me that any of this is very important."

One rainy day, quite by accident, bored and without purpose, she stumbles into the Fogg Museum and finds the Renoirs. They are small, not major works, and there are only two of them. But she does not leave them for a long time.

They are the only beautiful things she has seen in Cambridge.

2.

WE HAVE NEVER HAD A GIRL PH.D. IN THE FAMILY BEFORE – YOUR FATHER SAYS WE HAVE NEVER EVEN HAD A GIRL *M.A.* – AND SO OF COURSE WE ARE PLEASED. (ART HISTORY? I'M NOT QUITE SURE WHAT THAT MEANS.) YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW THAT EVE SPINDELL – YOU REMEMBER HER, THE ONE WHO COULD NEVER LOOK YOU IN THE EYE, IS GETTING MARRIED NEXT WEEK, AND TO A RATHER NICE MAN, I THINK. BUT THEN I DON'T GUESS WHAT I HAVE TO SAY MEANS MUCH TO YOU ANYMORE, NOW THAT YOU'VE DECIDED ON THE PH.D. AND ALL.

She is going into the museum, looks up, sees the Latin inscription carved in stone above the door. She sighs and thinks no, they are wrong; it is the *other* way around.

Life is long; art all too brief.

They go up the long marble staircase and off to the left is the Impressionists' Room and they find the painting and stand before it and the paint is so thick that it curls out several inches from the canvas and she knows that she is not supposed to touch it but she cannot help herself, reaches out and finds that there is glass covering the canvas.

"It's not just that he saw something out there that was different – anyone can do that today with a *camera.* But that he was able to mix his own special vision, awareness in with it – *interpret, transform, possess – so that we could possess . . . rescue from time . . . .*"

"Will you go to bed with me tonight?" he asks.

She sighs and moves closer to the painting. "For once in your life will you *please get serious?*"

He is talking to her, telling her that he is Irish and has come over to visit relatives and she thinks does every one of them have "cousins in Boston" and is not impressed but goes over to get another drink. He comes over again and says

"custom-made Jaguar"
"own a newspaper"
"building a house on the side of a mountain overlooking Dublin Bay"
"negotiating for the Fiat franchise in Ireland"
"may some day have a go at politics"
and she is still not impressed – he's probably a Catholic. But one of her friends says yes, a rather wealthy young businessman from Dublin – with quite an eye out for the ladies. He comes over to her a third time and says we seem to keep getting separated and she looks at him but he will not be put off and nudges her toward an empty room where although the music can barely be heard he holds her and begins to dance with her and she shivers and says please shut the window it's cold and he laughs and says not cold but because I'm holding you do you believe in love at first sight?

She is in the art library, off in a small room English-style, with criss-crossed lattices woven into the windows, looking at a folio of English paintings. She comes to the Turners, pauses, her breath taken away by the splashes of yellow sky falling into a blue churning sea. She stares at the painting, cannot take her eyes away, seems to be falling into the sea herself, she growing smaller, the painting larger, till she has lost all sense of self, is only a pair of eyes, merged one with the painting.

Outside the room it begins to snow, tiny flakes hitting against the window panes, but for a long time she doesn't hear them. Then slowly, she comes back, looks up, sees the snow. It seems yellow – she still blinded by the painting – yellow snow, only gradually becoming white, hitting against the panes. She gets up, goes over to the window, watches the snow falling gently outside, resting in little mounds on the tree limbs. She thinks of his face, it forming slowly in front of her, and remembers how there are two kinds of Irish faces: the ones with delicate features – thin lips and beautifully chiseled noses, the type of face the Irish saints must have had, and then the heavier face – ruddy red complexion and large nose of the rural Irishman, and that he has the second kind.

She leaves the window, goes back over to the folio, sits down. She looks at the painting again, its splashes of yellow, her breath stopped once more by its beauty.

That nose, she thinks. It would be all right for her sons, but she would not like it at all on her daughters.

They are on a sight-seeing bus, have just driven around Harvard, are crossing the Charles, headed back toward Boston.

He reaches over and takes her hand, and begins to smile.

"Why does it all have to be the biggest and the oldest – and the best?" he asks.

Ireland. To hell with your hot dogs and hamburgers and mechanical frozen orange juice and your efficiency and dull-everybody-the-sameness, in Ireland, Ireland, a man has room to grow, to become what he will become which is often something very different from what his neighbor has

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become without the television, newspaper, clock-on-the-wall telling him how he is to be, what he is to feel. In America all is problems, solutions, questions, answers – no time for the infinite, quiet, the land, mystery . . . Ireland.

She does not go to the library but spends all day downtown, trying to find a dress that she likes. Something simple – she finally picking a plain knit sheath – light brown, drawn in at the waist with a small-linked gold chain – in spite of all his money he likes simple clothes on women.

They go out to dinner and he begins talking, bending down low over the table toward her, his blue eyes shining, voice soft. She listens to his words, likes the way he pronounces them – not Irish, but English; not Cockney, but Mayfair – "bath" and "path" rhyming with "moth" and "Goth" – Ronald Coleman, she thinks. He goes on talking, and she thinks, no, not even Ronald Coleman. Softer, more intimate, with a slight catch in it – James Mason.

Suddenly he is no longer talking, she realizes, has asked her a question.

"Yes," she answers. "I'm listening."

After dinner they go to a play and then back to his hotel where he says won't you come in for a coffee? She thinks "in" means the coffee shop and goes in but finds out it means his hotel room. He orders the coffee, it arrives, only by then he is kissing her, trying to move toward the bed when she stops him – she is trembling – and so they move back toward the table. She tries to drink some coffee only by now it is cold and he picks up the copy of *Time* that is lying on the table, thumbs through it, finally throws it back down, saying I'm sorry, I didn't know, someone as lovely as you I would have thought . . . .

He gets up, finds her coat – she is still trembling, and they go out into the hall, down into the lobby, where he calls a cab.

He does not say much on the way back to Cambridge, hardly seems to know that she is there, until they cross the river, when he finally reaches over and finds her uncovered hand, pushes it deep into his own fleece-lined glove.

She has not seen him for three days, has heard that he has flown down to Florida for the holidays. She is restless, cannot concentrate, closes the book, moves over to the window.

He calls her that afternoon from Miami, says that all that sun and orange juice is all right, but something is missing – would she fly down? She is surprised but says no and he pleads with her – of course he'll pay for everything, but she still says no. He calls her again, four hours later, asking has she ever seen Miami at night – not all the night clubs and tinsel, but the *real* Miami – the beaches, the moon coming up over the water, but she still says no. So he says O.K., I guess I'll have to come to you, and fifteen mintues later he is at her dorm, laughing because he has fooled her; he had been in Boston the second time he called.

They are on the street now, walking toward the Square and he says I want to see your country – show me your country, not New York but something quieter – with a sense of history. She thinks of Williamsburg but does not say anything and he says Washington, D.C., I want to see your capital.

She does not think so – it's late, she'd have to get some clothes together and he says no need, they can buy what they need on the way down. She hesitates – she doesn't even have a nightgown, no toothbrush, and he laughs, looks up and down the street, leads her toward a ladies dress shop. She looks at the gowns – the sheer white negligees, does not know what to buy – has never done this before and somebody says it's almost closing time and he is waiting outside, looking in the window but pretending not to be watching, and so she panics and buys the first thing she sees.

They are in Washington before midnight and she is laughing, saying how did you get me here but he will not tell – that is his secret. They check into the Park Sheraton – miles from anywhere, surrounded by trees, and go up to their room. He is hungry – bloody ravenous, in fact, has not eaten since Miami and so he orders dinner: Chateaubriand for two – with Béarnaise sauce, lettuce hearts with Roquefort dressing, string beans with almond slivers – or would she prefer asparagus Hollandaise? potatoes au gratin, a side order of mushroom caps – broiled in butter, and for dessert, Cherries Jubilee – he will light it for her himself – and would she like cocktails, or sherry, before they eat?

After they have eaten, have finished their second bottle of burgundy, she knows it is time but cannot move. He goes in first, coming back out in a dark blue silk robe, pale blue pajamas. She goes in, unfolds the gown, does not like what she sees, cannot put it on, stays in the bathroom for a long time.

He knocks gently on the door, asking if she is all right and she comes out, wearing the gown, pale green flannel, with a high lace collar, long sleeves, gown touching the floor, a drawstring at the hemline.

"I wouldn't have bought it," she begins, "if I had realized . . . ." She doesn't go on, points down to the drawstring.

He backs away, tries to keep from laughing out loud, cannot even smile, she still standing there, uncomfortable.

"I guess I should have bought a robe, too . . ."

He takes his off, hands it to her. She puts it on.

He goes over to his suitcase, digs down past his shirts, "I have another one in here someplace." Clothes spill onto the floor; he cannot find it. Finally reaching over, he grabs his overcoat off the coatrack, puts it on. He walks over to the table, the rough tweed of his coat scratching against his neck, picks up the wine bottle, sees that it is empty, starts to order some more.

"Damn it!" he finally says, his voice suddenly angry. He takes off his overcoat, throws it on the bed, turns toward her.

"I mean," he begins, "do you know what the first thing I saw in this country was?"

She nods no.

"I hadn't been here *fifteen* minutes when I went into the

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restroom and there on the wall was a contraceptive dispenser . . . ."

That is when she realizes that he is a Catholic for sure only she has to laugh because he seems so angry, seems so red and puffed up, getting bigger all the time, like one of those pink Mickey Mouse balloons, only without the big ears.

"I don't want that for us," he says, coming back over to her. "We'll have sons and daughters – strong sons, beautiful daughters – hundreds and hundreds of them. A man's wealth is in his children, always in his children . . ."

Now he is no longer angry but has picked her up and is swinging her around and around her feet flying over the table where they have just eaten, over the bed and she is laughing and can't stop laughing and he says "Life, life, I want *life* around me" and now they are down on the bed and he is saying "not until you scream out for me, beat me on the chest, *implore* me to take you" and he has her robe off "not until you are crying out for me to make love to you" and he gently nudges his nose down over her gown, quick-kissing her breasts, naming one Mathilda and the other Guenevere only by now the flannel in her gown has begun to shed, tiny balls of fuzz getting into his nose – and although they are both so lovely, Mathilda and Guenevere, identical twins (*are* they identical twins? he smiles and wants to see) he doesn't know which one he loves the more. Only he starts to sneeze – the fuzz in his nose – *never* has he seen a nightgown like that before and suddenly the whole thing seems so ridiculous – the fuzz, his sneezing, the overcoat, her nightgown, and he is so silly, she thinks, 'Mathilda and Guenevere!' but glories in being so silly and seems so happy, laughing before and after and although she does not cry out for him, does not beat on his chest, imploring him to take her, he is so careful with her, so gentle and it is over so quickly, that it really has nothing at all to do with sex.

Except that she has fallen in love with him.

They have been in the room for several days and she has lost all track of time, is sleeping, and he awakens her whispering softly in her ear and tells her he loves her but that they must go out now because the thing about private worlds that people build for themselves is that although they are beautiful, they are very fragile, only become stronger if one leaves them for a while. So they go out into the afternoon, walking alongside the reflection pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial, and it is snowing, white flakes falling down over the trees and into the reflection pool and he tells her about Ireland, about how it is the only place in the world to raise children, every living thing one with the land, and she is walking a step behind him, her arms around his body, bare hands deep in his coat pockets, head resting on his shoulder, and she thinks the warmth of the human body, the touch of another, the peace within.

They are onto Constitution Avenue now and the cars are speeding by only she doesn't hear them and they pass the National Gallery and he asks does she want to go in and she says no and they continue on down toward the Capitol, she still a step behind him, her hands deep in his pockets. And yet, she thinks, it all becomes the past so quickly, already today is yesterday, what happened not so clear; I can't hold onto it, stop the movement, and he says are you feeling close?

Very, she answers and he says for a minute there I thought I had lost you, you are so distant sometimes, so remote I seem to lose you – as if you would prefer to spend the rest of your life walking in a park alone somewhere, sadly watching as the sun sets and she is afraid and says don't say that don't say that, I will never leave you.

He is leaving, has to get back to his business but not to worry, he will be back over before she can turn around twice and his plane is on the runway, engines starting, and she thinks that is him tapping on the window but she cannot be sure. Then the roar gets louder and the plane begins to turn away but she cannot watch, no longer watches, but must go back into the airport the tears coming fast now, she getting only as far as a telephone booth, where she hides herself, pretending to be making a phone call.

The ride in from the airport is always like this, he just in from Dublin, London, Rome, Amsterdam, Zurich, his red face smiling, he hugging her next to him, her face against the rich nub of his new suit, velvet trimmed overcoat, and she feeling like a queen or a movie star or the wife of a President. He is saying I've just taken out 200,000 pounds in life insurance – you'll be a rich woman if I should die, but in between the private words always the public picture taking, men running along the side of the cab, wanting to take her picture, asking for an interview:
how long has it been since
how does it feel to
where will you be going?

They are in the airport, waiting for their flight. They have been looking at postcards, maps of the city, when he moves toward the book section. He picks up a hardcover book, opens it, fans the edges of the pages against his fingers.

"I've always liked books like this," he says, "the edges of the pages unevenly cut – lacy-like, ragged."

She has moved beside him, is suddenly irritated, and for a minute she forgets everything, who she is with.

"But the important thing is – do you ever read them?"

He looks up at her.

"I mean," she goes on, "I have yet to see you *reading* anything."

He looks away, back toward the book, placing it on the shelf again.

"It was just a thought," he says, "an idle thought – about the pages."

He is sitting across from her watching, thinking that there is a man around and she is waiting for him and he is obviously her lover, obviously because she seems so full of expectancy, things kept secret. And she is very self-conscious, keeps looking to see if he is still looking and he sighs and gets up and goes over to the paperback rack and thinks how that even in the most beautiful of them it's there – that nun at the core. He spins the rack around but can find nothing he wants and he looks back over and she

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is still there so he sits down again, this time a little to her left. He pulls out a pencil and a tiny pad and begins sketching her, fleshing out her long brown hair as it falls down onto the dark green velvet of her dress and he sighs and thinks: which is only tolerated because at the core of each one of us is a priest.

Watching him walk toward the ticket counter, she knows that she has made a mistake. She gets up, goes back over to the book display, finds the book, runs her fingers over the edges of its pages. Looking inside, she sees the price – $12.50. Expensive, she thinks, but buys it anyway.

He meets her as she comes back, he not smiling, and she presses the book against his chest: I'm sorry. He bends down, kisses her on the nose, then leads her back toward the seating area. He is happy again, begins teasing her about where they are going – not telling her, making her try to guess where. Then their flight is called, and they get up, go toward the ramps leading out, he forgetting the book, leaving it lying on the chair.

She is smiling now too, sees the man still looking at her as she passes him, knows he must be an artist, the way he is sketching her, but she does not mind. She knows she looks good because he is beside her, has just pressed her arm against his side, and his sketching just adds to it all, the excitement, the plane-trip, being with him, makes her feel beautiful, more in love, like someone important, an actress, a movie star, the wife of a President.

Nassau
Acapulco
San Juan
Rio
Estoril
Las Palmas
Honolulu?

The plane lands and she steps out onto the ramp and says *Honolulu* and can hardly believe it, breakfast in Boston, dinner in Hawaii, but then the photographers are there and she knows she must stop them, that her only hope lies in stopping them, only she can't, one has just taken her picture. They get into a taxi and it speeds away leaving the photographers behind and they are safe for a while, safe until they get out where another one is waiting and so she raises her hand in order to shield her face but it does no good because as they step into the lobby of the hotel, a spreading series of bungalows, each with its own patio, each with its own tropical stream that finally feeds into a larger communal pool, there is another photographer who suddenly moves out from behind an indoor palm and this time he gets her picture. She knows her only hope is to get into their room quickly and so she is almost running down the breezeway, he out of breath behind her. It is only when they are in their bungalow, only when the door is locked, the curtains over the glass doors leading out to the patio pulled tightly shut, only when he is so glad to see her, so glad finally to be alone with her that he has taken off his shirt, his trousers, but not his shoes – so eager is he, only then, with both of them on the bed, the world locked out, with time and space finally suspended, only then that the photographers stop.

He sees her lying there, staring up at the ceiling, tracing with her eyes the loops of plaster ropes that four plaster angels smiling in the corners have spun out like a tent across the ceiling.

Gently he turns her head toward him and says, have you forgotten me and she smiles and says no.

Touch me, he says and she reaches over and begins rubbing her fingers across his chest and he smiles and says not there, lower, and she moves her hand downward.

He slowly turns and moves on top of her, kissing her, saying, *now, here,* look into *my eyes,* Daphne, and she closes her eyes and says yes, yes, don't ever leave me!

They finally reach the resort high in the mountains only it isn't the loveliest spot on the island – or rather it better not be and he becomes irritated – the bugs, it's so humid. He goes in to take a shower and comes back where she is waiting in bed and he is next to her, bare skin touching, and says it's funny, the whole time I was in there I kept trying to think how I would word it – how I'd ask you to marry me. That's easy enough she says, just *ask* me and he curses goddamn it, the bugs, I can hardly stand it, everything's so humid, not a breath of air anywhere did you know Puerto Rico would be like this?

Later she awakens and finds he is not there, is out on the balcony overlooking the hillside. She goes out and he is sitting there, restless, saying I must go back tomorrow, I'm sorry, the business, and she sighs and wonders what it is about him, his restlessness, he cannot stand to be away from Ireland for more than three days at a time.

They are sitting on a bench in Central Park watching an old lady across the path from them carefully laying out scraps of food on the ground for the pigeons, lettuce for the squirrels, and the girl cannot shake the depression, does not know why that sight of the old woman should make her so sad. And then he gently takes her hand and tells her but she is not surprised, cannot fight back, can only feel as if her life is over. The tears begin and he smiles and says remember all the good times, there were so many, not how the bottle is half empty, but how it is half full but she does not like his bottle at all, wants to smash it on the concrete in front of their bench.

You have been very precious to me, he goes on, I shall never forget and then suddenly as the old woman leans forward with her hand out, laying the lettuce on the ground, the girl seems to reach forward toward the squirrels, *her* hand full of lettuce, and suddenly she knows that she is that old woman, will someday be feeding the squirrels in a park like this, lonely, old, forgotten, with nothing better to do. She cannot look at the old woman any more, turns away.

Once in the plane away from him, going back to Boston, she cannot help herself but lets the tears come, does not hide in the restroom but lets them fall openly and unashamedly and thinks it is because I am not Irish, do not come from a wealthy family, cries so openly and un-

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ashamedly that finally the stewardess has to help her back to the stewardesses' private lounge where she will be more comfortable.

She has been lying outside in the sun all day because she cannot stand to be shut up in the library and her eyes are closed, covered with ice packs and she keeps thinking over and over that life is a tragedy to those who feel, a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel, a comedy . . . comedy . . . comedy . . . comedy . . . But the words do not work and so finally she gets up and goes back into the house, angry with herself for even thinking that they would.

She has suspected for a long time only tonight known for sure as he tells her of his need, this terrible hold the other boy had gotten over him – how he was his other self, only without all the weaknesses and how he has to possess those strengths, and of the guilt that followed, the horrible guilt that made his voice break whenever he was talking to anyone – even a close friend, or that it was finally impossible to give a lecture or to walk into a room where there would be even a few people, without first telling himself that everyone in that room had sinned, was just as guilty as he.

She reaches across the table and puts her hands over his and feels his anguish, his confusion, so much so that she wonders could she marry him.

A professor who is married, but who is not this evening thinking of his wife, suggests to her over drinks:

"Any extreme moral position is a way of keeping life from happening to you.

"Perhaps you are *too* moral."

She is vaguely aware that he is in love, not with her, but with something *about* her – things irrelevant to what she really is. She tells him this.

"Your *position?*" he says. "Christ. Of course I'm proud of . . . ."

"They have asked me to stay on," she continues. "Harvard has long emphasized the *study* of art – art as *history*, rather than encouraging the creative process itself. I think I can do something to change that."

He sighs. "Double talk. I don't want that for you. I want you to have a family, children. Christ, Daphne. You're almost thirty years old!"

She hears the words, but they do not touch her. Oddly enough, for some months now, time has had little meaning for her, and this fact has somehow come as a relief.

"I'm older than you," she says.

He sighs, then reaches across the table, his hands finding hers, and begins to trace the shapes of her fingers with his own. She becomes uneasy, leans toward him.

"I must go to Ireland first."

"Ireland?"

"Before I am sure about us."

"And after that?"

"What?"

"After Ireland, what *else* will it be?"

She does not understand. □

ROBERT PETERS

POSITION STATEMENT

unaware
that beneath its
old brown shawl
the lice are
rearranging
themselves
the day sits
cracking its knuckles.

the lice
will find new
routes into
the navel, new
headlands of
fat, brilliant
artillery
positions
along valleys
of muscle.

a minimal anxiety
keeps the tendons
of my neck taut.
I feel warm.

I love you
in whatever guise
you choose
to see me.
this day is
no more beggarly
senile than
any other.
who invented it?
who invented night?

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Robert Fox:
TWO LOVE STORIES

1. THE WEDDING

We almost missed the ceremony. The plane landed blindly, it seemed – guided out of the dense fog by its deft mechanical intelligence. Then we had to battle weekend traffic and wet freeways, giving directions we were unsure of to a young cabdriver unfamiliar with the area. Even when we arrived at the hall, it was necessary to consult a bulletin board, take elevators, walk up and down long corridors, and intrude upon several other affairs, including one Kiwanis celebration, where men and boys in baseball uniforms ran about the dance floor, under the great chandeliers. Lydia apologized again for taking me away from my work, and leaving the children so far away. But she had looked forward to her cousin's wedding for so long.

The ceremony was delayed, however, and we found ourselves entering the chapel before it had begun. We hastily took seats in the rear. The lights were dimmed and music began. A spotlight illuminated the organist who sat on a raised platform to the right of the guests, playing a medley of numbers that ranged from "Come, All Ye Faithful" to "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing." The spotlight dimmed and reappeared on the left. Marilyn stood behind a heart-shaped portion of a curtain, made of a gauzelike diaphonous material. A rear light brought Marilyn into silhouette. The wedding march began and the spotlight followed Marilyn's progress down the aisle, escorted by her parents who seemed to lift her off the ground.

Lydia remarked on Marilyn's stiffness, a pale and waxen aspect that became more evident through the ceremony. "I can't believe how ethereal she looks," Lydia said. Marilyn barely moved, and her faint voice seemed to have been done by ventriloquism. The ceremony was quickly consummated as the groom briefly kissed his wife's cheek while she stared straight ahead. The curtain dropped and the guests headed in a rush of noise and applause to the dining room. There was no reception line.

We moved through the giddy turmoil and smoke of freshly lit cigars, and after matching our tickets with table after table, found our allotted seats. We introduced ourselves to our companions for the meal, who turned out to be complete strangers acquainted with neither bride nor groom. Some foul-up at another affair caused them to dine here . . . Lydia excused herself to go to the ladies' room.

She returned out of breath and insisted that I come with her. I had just begun the soup, and its bare warmth had not yet succeeded in getting the November chill from my bones. "You'll finish that later," she said, seizing my arm. She was concealing, or not yet realizing, her own shock. I followed her through a series of awesome metal doors, and down the spiral stairs of a glass turret appended to the side of the building, lit by huge chandeliers. We went through more doors, and through the lounge of the ladies' room, and into a room marked private. Her cousin lay stretched on a table in all her bridal splendor. "She's dead," Lydia whispered. "We must tell Aunt Kay."

I examined Marilyn – her pale skin seemed glazed.

We hurried upstairs, again through the glass turret, which for a moment made me feel as if my entire existence was being spent in a bottle with an endless neck.

Lydia found her aunt making the rounds of the guests. Her aunt looked at us and drew away from a table laden with flowers, lit candles, and the main course.

Lydia began, "We saw Marilyn downstairs . . ."

Her aunt put a finger up to her orange lips. "Six days," she said, resigned.

"But how could you go through with this?"

"How could I prevent it? The invitations were out – the gifts bought – so many people like yourselves coming so long a distance. How could I? Think of the disappointment. Besides, you think it's so easy?"

At that point the groom mounted the stage and interrupted the band. He stepped up to the microphone and tapped it and blew into it. Then he raised both hands in peace signs until the crowd, which had begun to applaud, quieted. He then ran his hand through his fashionably-long hair. "I wanted to thank you," he said. "A lot of you have come a long way for this, and I want to thank you." His voice began to break and his eyes filled with tears. "Marilyn joins me – though she's physically not present – I mean it's really been swell – great of you – all the gifts –" he began to sob and raised one hand in the peace sign. His father appeared at the foot of the stage and waved for him to come down. He shook his head, coughed, and continued. "It's like – it's forever – you know?" and he stepped down.

The crowd gave him a standing ovation, whistling, food running from their mouths onto their lapels and stiff breasts. □

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ROBERT FOX has had work in DECEMBER, JEOPARDY, and WEST COAST REVIEW. He teaches at Rider College.

2. TWO NIGHTINGALES

As soon as the sky was born, it died. As soon as the city and its streets and buildings were born, they died. Then the dwarf jockey and his horse ascended to heaven.

He was walking down Ninth Avenue and saw the horse and rider come barrelling down the strip of turf in a cloud of hoohah dust. There were ten-to-one odds on *Born to Lose III* whom he would have bet on, his namesake, but this time he chose a winner and lost while *Born to Lose III* grinned and shuffled on the other side of the finish line; then the haloes appeared, and they rose off the ground in a flood of light and he could hear the golden flutter of angel wings beating welcome.

He stepped away from the betting window and excused himself to Mae West. Then a fire engine came down the fire lane on Ninth Avenue and the lines of pigeons on the lampposts fled; not like the eagles or hawks whose pictures he had seen in his father's dictionary without a binding that probably now mouldered against his bones in an unmarked grave. Once upon a time this city had been country. Once he had stumbled upon pictures of the city three hundred years before and thought, No, it must be some other place.

Then all the other horses came running down the street, on that strip of turf that had been laid back down like a carpet, and they crossed the finish line twenty minutes late and circled around in bewilderment looking for that heavenly place where a winner and rider had ascended.

A girl walked by, out of the old pinups, out of a '40s musical, and he crushed a cigarette into his mouth, breaking it in half. She stopped abruptly. "You got a light?"

He took her arm, but she jerked away and pulled a gas gun on him. The cigarette fell out of his mouth. It looked to him like a broken caterpillar and he wished it would heal and crawl away.

"Walk me home," she said, motioning with the gun.

She didn't live far, and when they arrived, she sat down on the unoccupied front steps of the building. He asked her if she had seen the ascension of horse and rider on Ninth Avenue and she said, "No, I just got here myself on a magic carpet. The sultan promised to let me out of the harem." She had an accent.

"You're a Jew and you work in a factory," he said.

"I may be a Jew, but I'm an artist," she said. "I'm just stating facts. I grew up in a convent. I'm probably as Catholic as you are, Frank."

"Don't say nothing against the Church," he said.

"You'd stick it in me the same you would a nigger," she said, looking away.

"Why were you in a convent?" he said, looking away, too.

"It was the war. I'd be dead otherwise. What about you? What do you do besides dream about horses?"

"I wasn't dreaming," he said. He saw an O. Henry wrapper on the street and wished it would turn into horse and rider ascending. It would be beautiful – she would be able to appreciate it because she was an artist. "My father was a hunter."

"A hunter? Here in New York?"

"He'd get up in the morning and hunt all over the Bowery for wine."

She laughed. He was surprised at what fine teeth she had, particularly for a Jew – they were good white even teeth without any gold fill.

"I'm a baseball player. Major League," he said.

"Mickey Mandel?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said.

"You won't believe who I am," she said.

"Who? Picasco?"

"How did you guess?" she said, starting to get up.

"You couldn't be," he said. "You're too young."

"How do you know I wasn't a child prodigy?" she said, and motioned for him to come upstairs. He followed her into a hall that was dim and rank like his own. "Look, Mickey Mandel, if you have so much money playing ball, why do you wear a $25 suit?"

"I retired. The future's uncertain."

"Yeah, the future," she said. "There's no such thing as the future. I died a long time ago – in the convent. This is a ghost."

On the creaking stairs in a dim hallway, he didn't like such talk. "Picasco's still alive," he said, uncertain.

"I'll do a portrait of you. If I am Picasso you can sell it for a fortune."

"I'll autograph your ass," he said. "Then you can stick it out the window."

"What a pair of love birds," she said, unlocking her door. "Two nightingales." □

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A STORY BY GEORGE V. HIGGINS

THE HABITS OF THE ANIMALS: THE PROGRESS OF THE SEASONS

Right after I got back from Korea – I had a certain amount of money – I took every nickel I had and bought a piece of land up in New Hampshire, south of Center Ossipee. That was in nineteen-fifty-four. The chrome on most cars was about a whisper thick and there was some kind of clear lacquer on it that had a tendency to peel and whiten when you washed it. But you could buy woodlots in New Hampshire for about twenty-five dollars an acre; I bought fifty-three acres, more or less, on a pond, and it cost me sixteen hundred dollars. It was all you could do to buy a halfway decent Chevrolet for sixteen hundred dollars then, and I got an apple orchard all gone to seed, some fine oak trees and pines, and several meadows full of tall grass and sloping very gradually down to the pond. There were beavers in the pond, and in the evenings it was still.

My wife was fit to be tied. It was not that she wanted, really, the Chevrolet. What she wanted was a house in, say, Framingham or Braintree or maybe Swampscott, Massachusetts. Definitely not any apartment in Quincy, which was what she had had during the war, and what we had had before the war. To do her justice, it wasn't much of an apartment. It was about the kind of an apartment that a police officer could expect to be able to afford in those days, which is about the same as saying it was the kind of apartment a police officer could expect to afford these days: not much of an apartment.

I tried to convince her that the kind of house we could afford to replace the apartment wouldn't be much of a house either, but that didn't work. If I had gone out and gotten the house she wanted, she wouldn't have liked it, once she lived in it for a while. But it wasn't the house itself – the house we could have swung with the down-payment I used for the land, instead – that I was fighting: it was the idea of a house. That was a lot harder, because it included cosy evenings by the fireside and prize-winning roses and gin-and-tonics on the porch in the summer evenings with the fireflies going on and off. It was not just a lot harder. It was a losing proposition.

I lost as graciously as I could. That was not very graciously. I was kind of annoyed that she seemed to be glad to have me back chiefly because she thought it meant I would now do what she wanted me to do, and that was to buy some rattletrap house that'd fall down if she snapped the shades. But I did my best to avoid talking about that, and I took a lot of grief. I figured that when the flak was over, I would still have the land in New Hampshire, and I wanted that land badly enough to put up with the abuse.

It took me a very long time to understand that there was more involved than the abuse. I tended to assume that when the noise died down, the matter was over. I neglected the lingering resentment. For ten or twelve years that neglect was all right: the resentment was still there, and it cropped up in most arguments (there will be a few when you spend the better part of your life away from a crummy apartment, at the barracks or on patrol), but I didn't understand that the fury I caught from time to time was really the continuing reaction to the New Hampshire land. I honestly thought that was over. So, where I would have gotten mad if I had understood that she was still flogging me for buying the land, ten or twelve years after I thought the matter was settled, I did my best to shrug off the complaints because she stated them as something else. Such as: Why the hell don't you get out of police work and into something that pays enough so I don't have to work all the time?

I didn't get out of police work for two reasons. First, because I couldn't; I was too old. When I got back from Korea – it was my second hitch – I was thirty-two years old. I had six years in, which left fourteen for a pension, and I was just too old to start in all over again, going to school and selling storm windows nights. Second, because I didn't want to. I liked police work. I still do. I was perfectly satisfied to spend my time working on murder cases to make a living, and doing the living that I made on the land I bought on the pond.

There wasn't much to the property but the natural advantages I have already described. The man who sold it to me was an old swamp Yankee that farmed it on and off when he felt like it, and didn't when he didn't. Mean-tempered old son of a bitch, I gather; if he ever had a wife he didn't have her when I got there, he didn't mention ever having one, and there wasn't any evidence of a woman ever having been around the house. The day I arrived to look the property over he was wearing one of those dark grey shirts and a pair of pants that'd gone out at the knees several times, and he nodded toward the house and said: "I lived here since I was a boy, forty years or so, and I'm sick of it. Going up to Maine. Not going to haggle. Sixteen hundred dollars, cash. Take it or leave it." To go with the house – three rooms: kitchen and sitting-room down, one large bedroom up, cramped bathroom that'd obviously been converted from a pantry – there was a small barn getting ready to fall down and a fruit cellar dug out of the side of a slope, with a leaky roof made of tarpaper and the door all choked in with brush. There was a stone wall that marked off the easterly boundary of the land, and the remains of a wooden fence leading away from the barn toward the orchard that never quite made it, but fell away

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into the tall grass before it reached the trees. I took it all.

Buying it was like joining a church, because it committed me to spending every weekend I could get, at least in the summers, working on the place. I started with the house. I jacked up the foundation and ripped out the plumbing. I replaced every pipe in that house with copper, and then I repaired the walls and painted them light colors, white and yellow. Most of the windows needed new sashcords and I had to reglaze every light of glass in the house. I stripped the floors downstairs, sanded and varnished them, and upstairs I covered the naked beams with wallboard and painted it light blue. I did all the wiring I could – most of it – and spent two weekends working paid details on the highways to get enough extra cash to pay an electrician to do the rest. I took out the rusty black stove in the sitting room and put in a Franklin stove that I got from Sears; when the doors were open, it was just as good as a fireplace and it threw a lot of heat. There was a massive iron stove in the kitchen that burned wood for heat and range oil for cooking. I left that where it was, but I gave it the first polishing it'd had in at least twenty years. I put in a used refrigerator and I ripped out the old slate sink – it leaked – and put in a porcelain one. Then I built up a cabinet around it, and I did the same thing in the bathroom and put in a shower, too. It took me almost six years to do all those things, and when I finished I decided I wasn't content with the heat. So I went back and put in radiators and a gas burner in the cellar – I had to make a concrete platform for it on the dirt floor – and I built a small shelter to conceal the propane tanks outside the kitchen window. I put a bird feeder on the corner of that shelter and on Thanksgiving morning in 1960 I got up early and went downstairs and watched several sparrows doing their best to frustrate a bluejay after the suet and grain. There was a heavy frost on the meadow that sloped down to the pond and there was ice at least ten feet out from shore that reflected the sunlight in the frozen weeds. My wife slept late. She generally did on such days. She said holidays depressed her because we had no children and holidays were meant for children, so she slept away as much of the day as she could.

With the house repaired, painted white on the clapboards with dark green trim and the roof reshingled, I became better acquainted with the land itself. I set out to prune the apple trees and clear away the brush that was stunting them, having it in mind to bring in a crop every year. The idea appealed to me. The few dwarf Macks that I rescued from the local deer tasted good. But I consulted some people who actually knew what they were doing and they told me that spraying and cultivating an apple orchard probably wasn't the way I wanted to spend the rest of my life, and they said it would take about all of that. So I lowered my sights a little. I just cleared out the orchard, removed the brambles, and burned over the deep grass. Even that small attention seemed to make a considerable difference: the trees seemed to straighten themselves up, and the apples the next year were noticeably larger. The real improvement, though, was the way the orchard began to attract animals. Particularly in the early spring, and from the middle of September on to about the first snow, deer came in groups of two or three to browse in the morning and again in the late afternoon and evening. There was a knoll about fifty yards away, and by sitting below the crest, to avoid frightening them with my silhouette, I got a good two or three hours' entertainment every week or two, watching the deer. I posted the property.

I left the stone wall alone. It had been constructed well – from which I concluded it was probably at least a hundred years old, because the previous owner never would have done anything that well. Anything that has lasted a century deserves to be let alone. But I brought in new poles and rails for the fence and I painted the barn the appropriate red and used it to store my tools. I chopped up the wood from the old fence and burned it, along with the usable pieces of wood I had saved when I tore out the fruit cellar, in the Franklin stove.

In the spring of 1964 – I believe it was May – I discovered a family of squirrels in the barn loft, apparently getting along nicely with the barn swallows, and a noticeable increase in the number of pheasant around the property. There had always been a lot of rabbit tracks around the place in the snow, but now I began to see them often. In April I had disturbed a fox hunting in the field south of the house, and during the summer I saw the vixen herding her cubs along the edge of the pond. There were groundhog holes in the field, of course, but I found tracks around the barn that I matched in a book with raccoon prints. From time to time I heard an owl.

These things gave me pleasure, and did not offend my wife. Perhaps she was so completely annoyed at spending all of our leisure time at the place that it took a complete catastrophe to upset her. At least that was what I concluded later, after the skunks.

I found the skunks the next year, keeping house in the darkest corner of the old fruit cellar. Fortunately I saw them going home, and was able to watch from a safe distance to see where they went. I had no interest in exciting them. At the time there were two, fully-grown. I suspected that there might be offspring around, but I did not investigate.

My wife's ability to contain her enthusiasm for my wildlife observations had long before gotten me into the habit of saying nothing about what I had seen. In that instance, having some premonition of her likely reaction, I said nothing. On the Fourth of July she saw a small grass snake crawling away from the propane tanks, and nearly lapsed into hysterics, and I reflected on the wisdom of my silence about the skunks.

I saw the skunks again, from time to time, but I never saw them with any young. Occasionally I would see one skunk, and more often the pair, but I never saw anything to indicate that more than two of them were holed up in the fruit cellar. Always I saw them at the northerly end of the place, out of sight of the house, and in a careless sort of way I rather hoped that they would confine themselves to those precincts. For three years they obeyed my silent wishes.

On Easter morning of 1968, my wife, doing dishes at the sink, looked beyond the bird-feeder and saw the skunks

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peacefully mincing across the front of the barn, heading back to where they lived, I suppose. She was very concerned, and directed me to shoot them at once. I refused. I can summarize what happened next a lot more comfortably than I can report everything that was said. She permitted herself the hysterics she had narrowly avoided when she saw the snake, and to me, at least at the time, seemed perfectly incoherent. The substance of what she said was that I preferred the skunks to her, because I would not kill them as she wished. I told her about Wicklow.

In 1948 I made corporal in the State Police and was assigned to Holderness barracks. There was a rule that you were not supposed to drink in the barracks, any barracks, and there was a longstanding custom of drinking in all of the barracks. Particularly at Holderness, which was away the hell out in the woods ten miles from God, but centrally located, as far as geography was concerned, on Route 81. In the Holderness barracks in 1948 there was also a big stupid trooper from Worcester named Wicklow.

Along with everyone else, except Sergeant Fitzmaurice, who had stomach trouble, Wicklow drank in the barracks. Perhaps the rule against it was declared to prevent the kind of things that happened when Wicklow drank: he wasn't a bad fellow, really, but he couldn't drink and he did. He did not become belligerent, or anything like that. It was simply that he was stupid when he was sober, and alcohol did not help him to be smarter.

The procedure of forbidden drinking at the Holderness barracks was as follows: prohibited beverages were consumed from their original containers in the two unoccupied bedrooms at the rear of the second floor. When the container was empty, the consumer raised the bedroom window and, using an underhand delivery with a lot of snap in the wrist, flipped the dead soldier out over the cruisers in the parking lot below and into the gully beyond them. The gully was full of underbrush, and in the course of time it also acquired a lot of empty pints and beer bottles. Two years ago, I understand, they burned over the gully in the process of enlarging the parking lot, and when the fire went out they found they had to go and get a dump truck to cart the empties away. Headquarters was furious, and for several weeks afterward, I am told, nobody drank in any of the barracks.

Wicklow and the rest of us deserved, although we did not, of course, receive it, a substantial measure of that anger. There were prodigious drinkers in the Holderness barracks in 1948, and we kept the gully rustling just about every night.

The local animals kept it rustling after we had gone to bed. There were rats and mice and rabbits and squirrels – and foxes and owls and hawks that came to hunt them – and skunks. Rats and mice and squirrels and skunks congregate at convenient trash piles. Partly they came looking for the sandwich wrappers and so forth. Partly they came because there is nothing a scavenger likes better than the nice starchy dregs of an empty beer bottle.

One night in July, Wicklow came back from patrol and pulled the cruiser into the parking lot just in time to see a skunk on the early shift heading for the gully. Wicklow was not completely stupid: he knew enough to stay in that cruiser until the skunk got well out of range. Then he came into the barracks with his bag of beer and he was all upset. He was outraged. "There's a skunk out there," he said, as though there'd never been a skunk anywhere before. "Right out there under the goddamned *windows*."

No one paid much attention to him. He went upstairs and joined up with some other gentlemen, also having a cold glass on a warm night. He sat there drinking his beer and going on about the skunk and getting thicker and thicker about the whole thing. When he finished the last bottle, he raised the screen, and when he did that he saw a skunk coming up out of the gully, going home. Little unsteady on his feet, too, weaving out of that dark gully, full of beer, halfway dazzled by the light in the parking lot.

"There's the bastard now," Wicklow said. "I'm going to shoot him."

Wicklow was a pretty good shot, drunk or sober, but no one was interested enough in his announcement to think about the possibility that he might hit the skunk. He got out his service pistol and he shot that skunk, a nice clean shot that took its head off. And that headless skunk went ass over teakettle and started spinning around just like a pinwheel, except that what was coming out of his back end wasn't sparks. Wicklow hit the skunk fat, and the skunk hit the cruisers – one had the windows open, not that it mattered – and the back door of the barracks and the nice, porous brick walls and the curtains in the mess; someone had left the windows up after dinner. It was six weeks and more before the place was fit to live in, and the smell got into the uniforms and the bedding. We woke up with it and we carried it with us on patrol and speeders grinned at us when they handed over their licenses and registrations, and our wives claimed we brought it home with us.

I reminded my wife of the summer of 1948 when she said I preferred the skunks to her. She was not persuaded. She said that if I didn't start doing something to make the place livable, beginning with shooting the skunks, she was never coming back to the property. The skunks proceeded delicately into the grass in the sunlight on the anniversary of the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and I stood there staring at that woman I had married twenty-two years before. Considering Korea and the other hours I spent away from her on other obligations, I figure we had spent the better part of those twenty-two years away from each other, learning things separately that were so different that we ended up never further apart than when we were together. Last November we were up there for the first snowfall, and in the early morning I saw three deer feeding on the tender branches of the apple trees. I made no effort to report this to her. I did not shoot the skunks, and she each week comes more than close enough to keeping her promise, though she is there in the still evenings when we do not speak. □

A collection of GEORGE V. HIGGINS' stories, Some Friends of Eddie Coyle, *has been published by Knopf; the collection includes "Dillon Explained that He Was Frightened" [Fall 1970].*

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Lamplight in October

A Story by David Hoskins

Teeth showing dry and cold: I am awake. He moved the small curtain, spilling dull light into the room. Rain. The distant mountains shifted in the haze, softly, a long way out. Imagine a sound like that. The sound that shift would make. Like a windchime, but softer. And dark. A sound of bones, freezing in a wet field. Bonechime? Something. Something absolutely minute.

From the hallway a sound of breakfast, coming on a thick waft of heated air. It is an early early time of day. And raining again. Water is everywhere, even in the corners of the room. He looked. On the wall above his bed water condensed slowly into droplets. It is everywhere. Everything is wet. Smelling of wet wool. I can feel it in my beard. Little motes of wet, all over me. Something I could say: a fine dust of rain. It gathers on me like a film.

He looked out across the yard, fogging the glass. Everything is there. I have forgotten all of them. Out there, the tools froze slowly in the rain.

In the kitchen he could hear her moving. A different sound in the clink and rattle of the cups. She is humming. He could not recognize the song.

—Are you awake?

She is amazing. She can feel me move.

—Yes.

He heard her footsteps toward him down the hall.

—You are awake.

She says that like naming a color: *That is red: You are awake.*

—Yes, I am. Good morning.

—Good morning. She leaned in the doorway, watching him. Smiling. And how is Mister Sleep?

—Sleepy. He smiled. Are you making breakfast?

—Yes. How many eggs?

As constant as the rain. *How many eggs.* He could smell the kitchen heat of her, soft and heavy in the cold room. She almost steams. Three days now: her second breakfast.

—Well?

—Oh I don't know, Da. Two, I guess. Two.

He eased into the cold part of the bed. Time to get up. She watched him, white and naked in the cold, and smiled.

—I got those things typed up last night.

—What things? Those poems?

—Yes. Those last two.

—When? You shouldn't have done that.

—Oh, I didn't mind. Really. She shrugged, smiling, wry. I didn't feel like sleeping so I thought I'd make myself useful.

—Well you didn't have to do that.

—After you died I needed something to occupy my time. The smile broke into a small laugh. I really did like those things, though. They were different. The images were really concrete.

—Yes, they were that all right. He looked at her and after a moment he smiled. I thought they were okay.

—Mm-hmm. Her eyes were soft. You know, it's really nice being here, she said.

—It's nice having you. It was good of you to come.

—It was good of you to ask.

He looked at her, smiling. Those eggs ready, are they?

—Oh my god!

She hurried from the room, laughing.

It is a small thing, this ritual of food. More for them. Like the tea late in the afternoon. I never ate breakfast in my life. Now twice. Even the floor is warm with it. He had an image of her over sinks, constant, her hair playing light. We will smell like that food all day. That is what marriage smells like. Breakfast and tea. The way the barn smells, too, of them. Their food. And dung. In his mind the dark and heated barn rose, quiet and murky, muffled with their sounds. The smell of dung and grain.

Dressing, he looked again through the steamy window toward the barn. Long icicles from the eaves. Like spears, or knives. Diamond? They glinted in the dull morning, a color of zinc. No. They are made of water. The hard kind. Water knives. Not bad. They will make a sound, too, when they fall. What? (A field of bones, centuries old, crumbling at the first touch of wind.) A sound like those make, falling. Bells. A soft sound of bells in winter, just at dusk. Bonechimes. A thin chime of bones. Yes. Something like that.

His boots made a thick sound on the floor.

—It's ready, Brennan.

And he, ready too, moved slowly to the thick air of that room.

—More coffee?

DAVID HOSKINS is in Lake Charles, Louisiana, starving himself and his wife while he works on a novel – from which "Lamplight in October" is taken.

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—Yes. Thanks.

She poured the coffee in his cup, the muscles in her arm tensing as she reached. That is a funny angle for her. Her hand trembled slightly. A small scattering of it on the saucer. He smiled at the way she wore her sleeves, rolled to the elbow. Like a man. She has strong hands, too. He thought of her, moving with her sleeves rolled in that way, her long skirts brushing the floor with a sound of wind. Always in those long skirts which she has never worn. Me, out in the deep snow, cutting wood. A good image. Concept of man and wife. A way to say it all, for everyone, with words.

—Are you going to call your mother, or what?

—No, she said.

—I could take you into town if you wanted to.

She smiled at him, warm and close. She is pleased by that. Little thoughtfulnesses. She thinks that is nice.

—No, I sent her a telegram this morning.

—A telegram? How?

—I just left it on the box for Mr. Johnson.

That is a half a mile to the road. (Old Johnson out there, opening the flagged box. The sounds carrying high and far in the frozen air.)

—A telegram, huh. Oh, she'll love that.

Her mother, sorting mail. *Hmmm, a telegram. I wonder what—? Good Lord, Lockie's got married!* Or do they call? I wonder what she will say? If she will be hurt. My father: *God damn, boy, you could have told us at least.* That was hard to explain. A telegram. I wish I had thought of that.

—Well she's probably already heard about it. From your parents.

Her eyes narrowed briefly. A beast, trembling at the edge of scent, deep in smoky woods. Nostrils flaring. Eyes yellow and opaque.

—She couldn't have come all the way out here anyway, she said. She smiled. Besides, that was the way we wanted it. Something private. Just between us.

Something private. Yes: our third day.

—They'll get over it, he said. They probably expected it anyway.

—I'm sure they did.

She picked up the slice of lemon and squeezed it again into her cup. A tiny spurt of juice sprinkled the table. He caught the smell of it, clean and pungent in the heated room. Small things like that. She brushed at the table there, smoothing the little drops into the wood. Women notice them. Living with women brings them out into the light. Like offering to drive her into town. Anything small. Or nice. He drank his coffee down.

—Well, I'd better get these dishes going.

She carried the rattling cups to the sink, rubbing her cheek with her shoulder. A kind of balance. He thought of a poem. Grace. A neural grace. What is that word? Tightrope walkers, animals, waiters. Women, too, messing with dishes and things that break. *Funambulism.* He watched her taking the stacked dishes to the sink. She is a funambulist. They all are.

—Do you want me to dry?

—No, Da. You just relax. There's more coffee if you want it.

—Okay. But I'll help if you want me to.

—You're nice. But I'll do it.

He leaned back deep into the chair while she poured a fresh cup of coffee. Light steam rose from the cup. I wonder if it is hot enough? He let the sugar slide from the spoon into the cup, his ear close, listening. Ah. Below the sounds she made he could hear it. A long soft sighing as it hit. That is like a breathing. Like the breath of something small. Asleep. Way down under the snow. Or a sound of clouds. Bells in winter, and the sound of bones. But under it, way down close and hard to hear, that sound of breath. Steam from teacups in a darkened room.

She washed the dishes quickly, efficiently, her ring laid carefully at the white edge of the sink. She is still not used to it. It collected water as she worked. A thin web of suds. Her breasts were moving gently at her shirt, the wet cloth pressing. He imagined moving in behind her, his body long against her shorter one, pressing, cupping her breasts. The gentlest way to touch. Their small weight softly in his hands. Warming the wet fabric. He watched the small frown she made. That is her business face. She does not know.

With great care, she rinsed a glass, inspected it, and placed it carefully in the rack. She reached for the dish-towel, pushing back a strand of hair with one wet wrist, leaving there a tracery of water.

—Da, will you—?

He laughed. She has felt me watching her.

—What are you looking at?

Self-conscious, trying not to smile.

—You, he said. You're not wearing a bra.

She blushed, laughing. Her arms moved to cover her. But she is pleased.

—No, she said. I'm not. It's more comfortable like this.

—Come here.

—I've got to finish these dishes.

Laughing.

—Come here.

She moved slowly from the sink, her wet hands up, spread, facing her. Like a surgeon. We are going to have an operation: *Are you all scrubbed, nurse?* He took her in, still sitting, his face against her breasts. Warmth and softness of them through the shirt.

—I'll get you all wet.

—Practicality be damned, woman.

He felt her hands at his hair, wet and cool.

—I love you.

—Mm-hmmmm.

—Come on now, I've got to finish those dishes.

She laughed, struggling away.

—How can you be thinking of dishes?

—How can you be so horny in the morning?

—So it's like that, is it?

He leaned her back, holding fast. She was laughing. She looked once to the sink, then back. Her eyes were heavy. Soft.

—Let me get my ring, she said. I like to wear it on important occasions.

He brushed his mouth against her through the shirt and let her go.

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He got up from the table and moved into the livingroom, closing the curtains as he went. Where, then? The couch? He unfolded the heavy comforter and spread it out. Yes. We will bundle here in the dark.

In the kitchen she was moving. He watched her close the curtains and fix the Coleman on the table, her face and arms rich in the color of lamplight. He smiled. Things had to be fixed for them. The lantern there, just so, coloring our skin. He watched her then, till she was through. The hissing of the lantern came to him through the dark, as poignant as the breath of birds.

Outside, the rain half turned to sleet. It sounded on the brittle leaves, the stretch of frozen yard with all its neglected tools. Winter sounds. Lacing the world with ice. Behind us now, and moving. A counterpoint to this. He leaned down to his boots, unlacing them. I must not forget those tools again.

—Let me do that.

And she knelt there, working with her small strong hands, her shirt opening as she breathed, her breasts moving. And she undressed him, her voice moving through the winter sounds, gentle and warm in the close darkness. Her voice inside this rain, soothing, speaking to something wild. Me. All those mountains out there, freezing. Making sound.

They made love wrapped deep inside the comforter, her skin smelling of breakfast and of tea. A soft web of light reflecting from her hair.

She leaned across him for a cigarette, her breasts pressing. Matchfire, the color of lamplight. That little sound.

—Am I too heavy on you?

—No.

—Good, she said.

She handed him a cigarette and he drew on it, listening. The sound it makes. That is oxidation. He thought of it. Things breathing under snow, a long way down. Underneath the sounds of winter. That is the sound of things using oxygen. Burning or breathing, it is the same. That little sound. So long as they are small. Candles would be a sound like that.

—What time is it, Lockie?

—Almost three.

—Jesus. We took a long time, didn't we?

She laughed. Her skin gleamed, rich shadowed gold in the hissing lamplight. The color goes with it. That gold, and the shadows. And smoke. Above them, the blue haze of smoke shifted in the still air, breaking the narrow column from her cigarette. She exhaled. A long and singular sigh. That boil of smoke marbling the air. What would that be? (Mountains, early in the evening, hazing a soft film of blue in the distance.) I have seen that many times. Or in the morning like that. What would it be? That time of day?

At the edges of the couch the smoke had begun to settle, moving in a slow and heavy drift downward to the floor. It is settling. It is heavier than air. (A haze of smoke through rain, smoky, hazing the mountains. Settling down across them like a smoke.) Yes. That line of dim Sierras. I have seen that. What, then? Smokefall? *What time is it, Lockie? It is smokefall, Da.* Yes, and that should have a sound, too.

Light showed behind the curtains, a leaden grey. It is dark here with the curtains drawn. Like dusk all day long. He looked at the crack of light between the curtains, brighter than the room. He could hear the sound of rain. At smokefall. That lovely sound of rain, hitting the walls. Smokefall, inside and out. The lantern sputtered in the kitchen, flickering. Shadows moved. Her body is alive with them. They move across her like hands.

I look more muscular in this light. Because of the shadows. He smiled. A trick.

That damned thing couldn't be going out already.

—Da?

—Yeah?

—Are you going to send any of those poems out?

—What, those last ones?

—Yes. The ones I typed last night.

—Oh, I imagine I will. Why?

—I just think you should. I think somebody would publish those.

—Well, I've got some stuff out now that I should be hearing about pretty soon.

—What is it?

—Poetry. The first ten or so from the volume.

—Where did you send them?

—*Poetry.*

—Do you think they'll take them?

—No.

—Oh.

He looked at her then for a long time. Her face was shadowed, serious.

—Why? What's the matter?

—Nothing.

—Nothing, huh? You don't think I should have sent those?

—Well, let's put it this way. She moved to face him. I don't think you can blame them if they do.

—Do what? Reject them?

—Yes.

—Why not?

—Oh, I don't know. I'm really not very qualified to say anything about it. You know me – my favorite poet is Robert Browning.

He smiled. Outside, the wind gave a long sigh, breathing hard. You and me both, he thought. She looked at him.

—I just wouldn't blame them if they did turn them down. Look, I don't know anything about modern poetry. Mac likes your stuff. And he's a lot more qualified than I am. So are you.

He thought of Mac behind the red desk in his office. Looking up: *I don't know, Brennan. This last one – well, it just doesn't come up to the others. I can see what you were trying to do, but it just doesn't make it. It doesn't work. I'm sorry.*

—Look, Lockie – I know you don't like to criticize my work. But really, I don't mind. It doesn't bother me. He smiled at her. I'm aware of your lack of qualifications. Besides, I like to know what you think.

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–All right.

She moved to a small groan of springs, twanging dully. He felt her shift. We are naked on this couch, talking business. She's forgotten. He could imagine her, voicing her thoughts, speaking in those tones to everyone.

–I told you this morning that I really liked those last two, she said. The ones I typed last night. And I did. Really. I thought they were fine. *But* – I thought they were different.

–Different how?

–Well for one thing they were more clear. I know, I know – Robert Browning is not the final measure of value in English literature. But Lord, Brennan, I'm a fairly intelligent reader, and most of the people in this country who buy poetry are more like me than like Mac. And if we can't understand something, we're not going to buy it.

–I don't care if it sells, Lockie.

–I know that, Da. But you do want to publish it. And you want it to do something. Don't you? I mean, what's the point of it if nobody can understand it? What will it do? No, no, let me finish. I think you can write beautiful poems. You have. And I think you can write deep, complicated poems. But if you have half the talent you and I think you have, you can reach a median of some kind – poetry has to be intelligible.

–What you're saying is right, Lockie. But I think the volume does that. I think it is intelligible.

–All right. I'm just saying what I think. You've done a couple of poems that are so good they make my eyes cry. But most of them I just don't get. They're too obscure. Too choppy. You get hooked on words and you use them over and over. I wish you would count how many times you used the word 'shimmer' in the volume.

He lay back, listening to her, watching the guttering lamplight shimmer in the room. Outside, rain shimmered the mountains in a blue haze of mist. Smokefall, shimmering like ink. A constituted image. U.S. Patent pending. Maybe she is right. Things do shimmer quite a bit. Sound shimmering in a soft dust of chimes. Beat it to death before you quit. He almost laughed.

–And I wish you'd check out your work to see just how many of your poems are nothing more than lists of things. You know: 'I see this and this and this.' You spend an awful lot of time cataloguing things, Da. Sometimes it sounds like you've just woken up and you're walking around in a totally new world, naming things. She sat up on the couch, earnest and intent. Her breasts moved softly, swaying. What's that line you liked so much from Snyder? That one about the pine? That's exactly what I mean.

I call him fox because he looks that way. I call this other foxtail pine. Something like that. God. She is a wonder. Everything I say.

–You know which one I mean.

–Yeah.

–Well, that's exactly what I mean. You're in your own private little world in your poetry. And unless somebody knows you, and knows everything you've done and seen, he's lost. He's just not going to be able to follow you. He's not going to know what you're naming, or why, or what the names mean.

She sat looking at him.

–Do you understand what I'm saying?

–Yeah, I understand. I know you feel that way. And I admit I'm far from any true mastery of what I'm trying to do. If I've made it in a few poems, then that's not a bad average.

–I suppose not, she said. I really shouldn't say anything about it.

–No, that's not true. I like to know what you think. I don't want you ever to feel that you can't tell me exactly what you think about my work. And be totally honest about it, good or bad. Okay?

She smiled. Yeah, she said. But you probably shouldn't listen too hard to me. As long as Mac thinks it makes sense and thinks it's good.

There was a long silence. She leaned down and put her head against his arm.

–I love you.

–I love you too.

No. What I am doing is worth it. It works. He lay there, holding her, until the lamp went out.

–What time is it?

She moved to see.

–Four thirty-five.

–I'd better go out and try to get some work done, he said.

–What are you working on?

–A short story.

–A short story? I didn't know you were planning to do any prose.

–It's the first one since my freshman year in college. He laughed.

–I really think you should do more prose. I've always told you that. You have a very clear prose style.

–Well thank you. Coming from my toughest critic, that's quite a compliment.

He got up slowly in the dark room and walked to the windows. The floor was cold. He opened the curtains letting the grey light from outside spill across his body.

–What's it about?

–The story? It's about you.

–Me? Is it a sad story?

–No. It's a funny story.

–Are you in it?

–Yes.

He turned to face her. The light from the window made a patch on the floor, reaching across the room to her body. Her breasts glinted white in it, very white against the darker skin of her stomach and chest. Her nipples were tight with the cold.

Yes. I am the funny part.

The freezing rain came down, small and soft and steady. Like a mist. The thin swirling of it stretched as far as he could see. It stung his face, a tiny pinpoint heat. You can't tell the difference when it hits. Hot or cold. He stood on the small porch of his cabin feeling it. Like passion. That can be love or hate. Or even pain.

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He moved his feet on the wide boards of the porch, ploughing a small hill of slush. Soon it will be sleet. Along the underside of the railing of the porch small icicles had begun to form. They dripped slow water down onto the boards beside his feet, beading the rough skin of his boots. He put on his gloves, pushing the fingers of one hand into the crevices of the other to fit them tight.

In the west, above the line of high mountains, the sky tinged toward brown. That is the sun. A sick color. Above him it was grey, a low ceiling. But it edges toward brown over there in the west. In the mountains. He buttoned the coat tight around his neck and started down the steps, slowly, so he would not slip.

To his left, across the narrow frozen pasture, was the road. Rutted deep, but frozen. At the edge of it, canted toward the north, the mailbox. He could see the trampled, pockmarked field, the road, the dark line of woods beyond. And beyond that, the high blue line of mountains where the sky was turning. The flag is up. He squinted, the rain stinging softly at his face. Johnson forgot to put the flag down. He could barely see the dull spot of red it made against the dark wall of the trees beyond it. That is almost brown, too. Like the sky. The old bastard forgot the flag. Or didn't come. If the road wasn't frozen this morning it would have been hard going. He could see a row of small icicles along its northern edge, shiny in the dim, even light. That's a good long way for her to walk. Especially in this rain. He stood considering it. No. Johnson probably just forgot to put it down. I'd just have to go out again tomorrow morning if he didn't. Anyway, it won't hurt him to stop tomorrow, mail or no mail.

—Da?

He turned. She was standing in the doorway of the cabin, behind the screen, small and rumpled in his wool robe. He smiled at her.

—Can I come out and visit you later?

He leaned against the railing, his hand above the shining knives of ice. One booted foot moved back up the steps toward her. It is too soon for us to be apart. For her. He smiled at her, warmed.

—If you want to, he said. But I'll be back in a couple of hours. Probably not that long.

—Well, I might come out. If it'd be all right.

—It'd be fine. I'll probably be getting a little lonely out there anyway. We haven't been married long enough for a separation yet.

—I love you.

—And I thought it was going to be cold today, he said. He saw her laugh.

She closed the door softly, shaking loose a small spattering of ice, leaving him to the quiet sound of wind and rain. He squinted once toward the west.

Still that brown. He started down the steps. Wait. I wonder—? He leaned down and very slowly ran his finger underneath the railing. The icicles broke easily against his glove, falling to the ground like broken glass. Or ice. He remembered once, as a child, that hard spring freeze in Oklahoma. That day it froze. Kenneth found that flower frozen in the yard and we didn't know what to do. In his mind his shy and trembling hands reached toward it. Awed. It looked like flowers look except there was a frost upon it, hazed, like his breath on mirrors sometimes, in the winter. It shattered to the ground like broken glass. Red. Or ice. A sound of chimes.

He listened very carefully to the falling shards of ice. They made no sound. No sound at all.

He stood, feeling cold, and walked quickly across the frozen yard toward the barn.

The barn door slowly swinging to, creaking, a long unfluid arc, shuddering, moving slow, the barrage of sound going deep. It hit and stopped. Outside, the rain moved across the grey wood, scrabbled quietly at the roof. He could hear it. Sound. He reached to his right, his hand down the rough wood to the lightswitch. Splinters snagged his glove, a soft tearing sound. The light came on. It swung slowly on its long twisted cord above the second stall. Shadows breathed across the floor, the walls, moving in a rhythm with the light. The barn was empty.

He took off his gloves and walked across the wide-planked floor to the gas heater which stood against the far wall. He found matches in his coat and knelt down and lit it, adjusting the flame carefully so it would not be too high. The flame was blue, burning to bright yellow at the top. He knelt there for a moment, watching it, hearing the soft hissing that it made, smelling the gas. Then he stood. He looked out through the dirty window at the frozen field. A small group of horses out there, milling.

Hanson's horses have come in. They moved behind his reflection in the glass, breathing. Small clouds of steam blowing white in the dark air. He watched them for a long time.

At the end of it he turned, unbuttoning his coat. He walked across the floor to where the ladder stood, leaning dusty and weathered in the swinging light. It was an old ladder. Home made. It creaked and swung badly as he climbed.

There was a small gas heater in the loft and he lit that too. He took off his coat and hung it up. In the corner of the loft, there in the office he had made, was his desk. In the top drawer there were three ballpoint pens. On top of it, the story he'd been working on. He lit a cigarette and walked slowly across the loft. He sat down at the desk, turned on the small lamp, and began to read through the sections of manuscript he had finished.

It was colder now, and the rain was freezing as it fell. The wind was up a little. He could hear that, and the louder sound the rain made, hitting the roof.

Two hours later, he leaned back in the chair, sighing. Very carefully, he arranged the papers on the desk, turned out the light, and stood. The sound of the chair scraping across the floor was loud. He turned off the heater, got his coat, and climbed slowly down the ladder. Through the window he could see that it was dark, the sky barely lighter than the line of trees. He could not see the mountains at all. He turned off the heater below, but left the light. He buttoned his coat, put on his gloves, and left the barn.

Outside, it was very cold. Hanson's horses had come into the yard now, close, milling around the frozen ground as

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old and patient as the earth. They looked up as he came out. They stood there, watching him, suspicious, their nostrils blowing huge clouds of steam.

He left the barn door partly open for them and started toward the path. Ahead of him, yellow lamplight tinted the freezing rain. She had put the lantern out. It hung against the cabin wall, a beacon.

He walked slowly down the frozen pathway to the house, the yard spreading around him with its cluster of his tools. The shovel leaned against its tree. The axe, a line of ice gleaming down its handle, was frozen to its stump. The rake. The cracked jumble of firewood by the shed. The rain, freezing softly in the hammock. These things, then. Forgotten here again. These are the only artifacts I know. The way they work.

The lantern she had hung circled a small perimeter, the land beneath it shimmering. Overlaid with thin sheets of hammered gold: the lamplight. It does look like that. He stopped at the light's edge. Inside the cabin he could see her moving through the kitchen making tea. The yellow lamplight deep around her, thick and moist. That is for her visit. And her skin, the color of making love.

He looked down at the light playing on the frozen ground. The circle of my house. The round that lantern makes, almost touching me. This is where I begin. *In medias res.* Here inside the circle of my house, where my things are. At the edge of lamplight. And that could be a line. A thing to say. *Here at the edge of lamplight, where I rise at morning to the sounds you make.* Yes. Smokefall, too. And the chiming rattle of bones. What? Porcelain, perhaps.

It is full circle, that is sure. *In medias res.* Here in the middle of my things. What did she say? Naming the aspects of my life? My properties: there is this and this and this.

The rain moved around him, close and freezing as it hit his coat. He could hear it rattling high in the trees. Sounding brittle. Loud. That is the way it is – that sound. That is the way it breathes. Metabolism. A word like that to name it. No. That is just the way it breathes. That big sound of wind.

But this is foolish.

He stepped forward, his boots coloring suddenly warm in the soft light.

Wait.

He looked back toward the barn. There, silent and unmoving at the door, the horses. They stood there, watching him, their eyes a deadly stillness in the cold air. He could see the heavy cloud of breathing that they made. They are watching too. And breathing. Waiting to see. And here I am, in time to name it all.

This and this and this.

Inside the house Lockie was singing, waiting for the water for the tea to boil. He could see her.

It is all here. I can name it: her: the frozen quince against my coat: the gate: me, standing here, mindful of so much.

For one moment his mind moved dreamlike at the barn, watching the long door swing open without sound. The barn rising quiet and murky, muffled with their sounds. They were there. Inside. He heard them.

The wind breathed into the trees above him: the door swinging wide, soundless, and the barn, there, opening.

That is like that sound to me. That is like that sound when I first entered, shadowed in the last year's flight of swallows (fluid past belief in shadow), deep into the warm wet middle of the hooded barn. There where the soft wood rots, making heat. Where mice breathe, whispering, hot and secret in the small crushed pulp of corn. And the beasts moving, in there, turning their huge slow eyes to see. It is like that. In his mind he stood, freezing in that heat, listening. Their huge hearts pounding slow. Me. I am like that here, standing in the circle of my things. (Children, precarious at the edge of ice, high in the black middle of the frozen lake.) The way they stand. It is something more than fear.

He looked back. They stood there.

A way to say all this. How they stand. I can almost feel them breathe. Their hearts.

Somewhere close, he heard a stifled cry. Crows, stark and clear in the quiet rain. That would be a sound for it. What? A grammar. A way to speak. A wet grammar of crows. It is late for them.

His feet were numb. He moved them inside his boots, but he could not feel them.

But this is foolish. I am naming things again.

Lockie was pouring the tea, arranging dishes on a tray. To meet me in the barn. He watched her move, her skin glowing in the yellow light, flushed with the room's heat. She moves so slowly. Like them.

He felt a thrill of fear, tightening his groin.

Like them.

He had an image of her heart, pounding slow, beating. Pounding the slow blood-heat along her body. Like that. Standing like that in postures thousands of years old. What women have always done. And bound inextricably to the earth, to the tides. Those things. Deep through mounds of yellow light. Like them. Or something else. Just as ancient. Just as dark.

He looked once more behind him, a quick look, a glance.

There is such slowness in the way she moves. And those. It *is* something more than fear. A thing to say. Smokefall. Bonechime. Breathing.

There is such slowness in the way she moves.

At smokefall, here, where night with the eyes of horses turns me frantic into lamplight, raked pounding by the great beasts, in memory, steaming in the cold rain. Yes.

He shook his head. Yes.

But it is foolish to be so literal.

He hunched his shoulders against the wind, moving stiffly through that lighted circle to the steps. Lockie was surprised.

–I was just going to take you some tea, she said. But I guess we can have it here.

Later that night the wind died and it snowed. Huge heavy flakes of it, whispering, swirling slow and soft in a ringing silence of wind. Crows moved in their sleep. An icicle broke from the barn and fell, shattering in a sound of chimes on the hard and frozen ground.

The horses shifted, hearing it. □

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Faye Reddecliffe

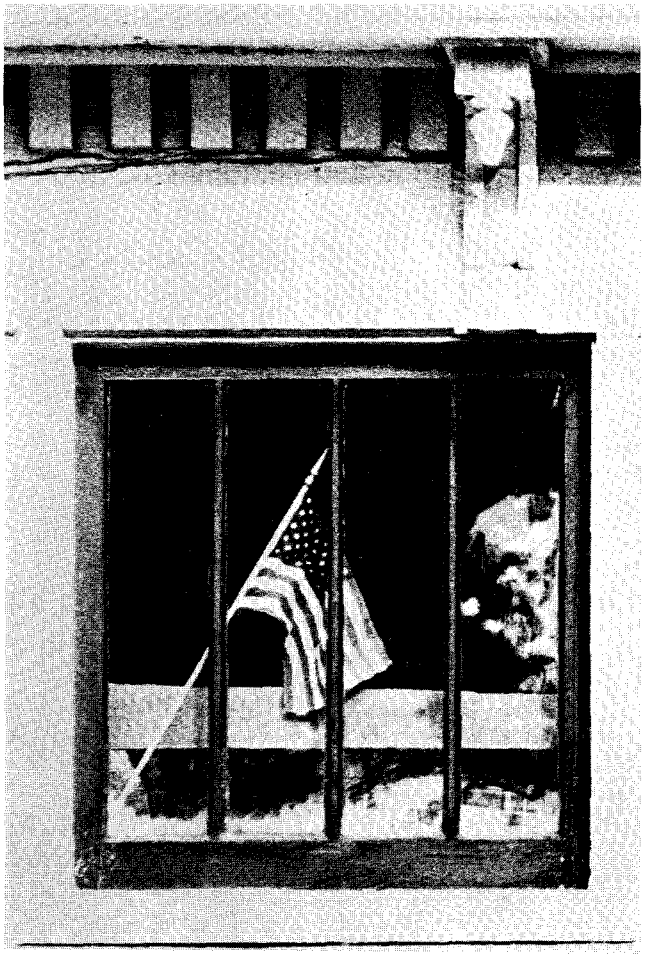
THE FABULIST

The Ice-Cream Man Doesn't Come Anymore

No other town boasts "the steepest inclined plane in the United States." At the end of a rust-stained bridge, the tracks start and go almost straight up while, spread below, streets cut the town into triangles, blocks, and rectangles. On the left, the smokestacks of the mills where almost everyone's father and brother work. The stadium and high school are on the right. Invisible from the inclined plane, the green patch in the center of town where old men and teenage boys gather to talk and watch; beside it, a cement and iron horse trough listing the town's World War I dead on a tarnished plaque. On top of the hill is the wealthy part of town. To see any of the houses, you have to get out of the car and walk for half a mile (it costs 15¢ to go back down).

* * * *

A long-time ago, there was an ice-cream man with a blue and white truck that had red-striped awnings and a bell. On unbearably hot summer days, he came to distribute: ice-creams – plain and chocolate-coated; ices—pastel green and pale pink, rich brown and orange; drumsticks – sugar-coated cones and chocolated peanuts. When small fingers let slip a chocolate cone, the ice-cream man would fix another while the chocolate pool grew on the hot cement. But he doesn't come any more. Maybe the children were too eager, the nickels and dimes too few.



* * * *

Because of a too-tight spring on the door of the neighborhood store, the door sometimes snaps shut on a customer's sweater or pants leg. The "For Sale" sign has disappeared from the empty house next to the store. There are rumors that people "of color" bought the house. While slicing boiled ham, the store's owner, Mrs. Fallon (a widow), tells people, "Of course not."

Mrs. Torrance, down the block from our house, believes in God and America and a past with "home-made ice-cream and lawn parties." Sometimes on cold mornings, I can hear her calling her dog, who must go out by himself – on the cold mornings.

* * * *

One year, they made the vacant lot on the corner into a playground with a sawdust floor and swings that swing out over a round sandbox with seats, a leg-power merry-go-round, and an eight-step sliding board. But I never played there. Around the lot, a storm fence and gate keeps out big kids. (I was tall for my age.)

* * * *

Early evenings and Sunday mornings, the church carillon plays. You can hear it all over town. It's automatic and anyone can donate money for a tape *in memoriam.* Already there's "Old Rugged Cross", "Church in the Wildwood" and "Meet Me in Saint Louis."

Into a church room of dust-clogged velvet drapes and card-table chairs, the minister once looked to say, "Pray. Pray for Billy Denton." He went on to the next Sunday School class. Through a cardboard partition, I heard again the plea: "Pray."

* * * *

I prayed for Billy Denton. But he died anyway. □

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MICHAEL S. ALLEN

HOME IN THE WOODS

Down the tree trunk split
in the wall rock, he is loose
in his face a scent of skunk musk
burning, the boy is burning
candles in a pine grove hitting a tree
hitting a tree, rocks for hearing fall
against the sandstone ravine
the ferns curling soft fingers
out of the mother stone a crack
a hundred places for hiding
iron pouring out of the skin.

Mosses and creepers and I balancing
the storms of eroding rock on the ledge
hoping to see my way clear
out of the sky out of the wall the water
I do not fall, I do not see this
pulling the dead duck weed, dry stream
down to the river sinking out of the stone
sinking in autumn.
And there, there in the deer's back
old bones I had hung on her neck back
in town, covering her body no way to see
without cover, I am the leaves, the bushes.
There is that scent again
skunk cabbage swallowing the forest wild, whole
oranges in the air in the air
the eye of an orange, there
is the well in the stone, emptying
lost water from her hands, here filling my arms
and running my legs faster than I could hope
are clear bubbles from the dead rock
the first gift
I lost when creating the world
my way.

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Gail Godwin/Nolan Porterfield/Robert Phillips/John Lindberg/A. C. Haman

An Oates Scrapbook

Wonderland, by Joyce Carol Oates. Vanguard. $7.95

1. Why I Like Reading the Novels, Stories, Poems, Essays, Letters, (and Scraps of Paper from her Pocketbook When They Become Available) of Joyce Carol Oates

Some writers arrange this multi-faceted, multi-layered experience we call life. Others derange it. (*Derange:* a favorite Oates word.) Now there are few more satisfying pleasures for a reader than to come across a novel or story which tells intelligently and passionately how it might be possible to live a better life, which orders and defines the overwhelming data of experience. But there is another kind of satisfaction to be derived from a novel or story which *refuses* with intelligence and passion – and curiosity – to tell how to live, a novel which purposely dissects, disorders, disarranges the 'normal' patterns of things. This second kind of satisfaction comes from the dawning in the reader of new ranges of tension. Nothing may be solved on the level of old dichotomies, but the ground has been broken to make way for future perspectives, possible solutions. (How could we do heart transplants today if Harvey, four centuries ago, had not dared to violate the 'sanctity' of the human cadaver with his knife?)

> "Because things are so atomistic and crazy I suppose we should just enjoy it; at least we have books to write and, better yet, to read. *That* is something to make insomnia worthwhile."*
>
> "Reality is fluid and monstrous; let us package it in as many shapes as possible."
>
> —"The Nature of Short Fiction"
>
> Jesse had the idea that what people thought were stories were fragments from shattered wholes, the patterns, the brain waves, of a certain man at a certain time in his life, the record of his controlled and uncontrolled inner life . . .
>
> —*Wonderland*

My favorite Oates dissection is a story, "Unmailed, Unwritten Letters." The woman of the story is *thinking* these letters she could write: to her parents, retired and living in the Southwest ("I see the highways going off into space and wonder at your courage, so late in life, to take on space."); to her husband whom she is betraying with a lover (". . . if I go to your closet and open the door your clothes tell me as much as you do."); to the lover's daughter ("A ten-year old cannot compete with a thirty-year old. Send me all the flowers you want. I pick them apart one by one, getting bits of petals under my fingernails . . ."); to her lover ("Last night I dreamt about you mashed into a highway."); to the Editor ("Anonymously and shyly I want to ask – why are white men so weak, so feeble?"); to her lover's wife ("Were you ever beautiful? He says not. So he used you, he used you up. That isn't my fault.") On and on the letters go, accumulating details, sensations, repeating and contradicting themselves, setting up parameters only to slip through their molecules. ("I am sinking slowly through the floor of this expensive house, a married woman in a body grown light as a shell . . .") The lover's daughter attempts suicide by taking an overdose of aspirin to get her father to return. The woman drives him to the airport, makes love to him on a closed-off stairway beside his departure gate. After seeing him off, she returns to the parking lot, can't find her car and checks into the airport motel to take a bath. ("What good luck, to be free again and alone, the way I am alone in this marvelous empty motel room! the way I am alone in this bathtub, cleansing myself of him, of every cell of him!") This ends the letter to her husband which began, "My dear husband, I want to tell you everything. I am in a motel room . . ." But she does not conclude after all. Something compels her to break out of the neat ending she has 'written' for herself. She begins another fragment of letter to her lover: ("My darling, You have made me so happy . . .") She is the surreal woman, bombarded by sensations, experiences, trying constantly to organize these, yet unwilling to become circumscribed by any form she might put them into. 'Writing' these unwritten letters which keep track of her life as she lives it, yet go unmailed, is her way of annihilating any process which might limit her identity.

> "What a confusion life is! . . . I've come to the discovery that no one knows what he is doing, that everyone is mixed up, whirling and spinning and grabbing, some people falling down in the mud and jumping up and running and slipping cheerfully and falling on their knees and elbows, oh but up and running again with a smeared grin . . ."*
>
> nothing stays
> the X of our lives' center
> —"Ordinary Summer Days"
>
> "The world has no meaning; I am sadly resigned to this fact. But the world has meanings, many individual and alarming and graspable meanings, and the adventure of being human consists in seeking out these meanings."
>
> —"The Nature of Short Fiction"

* Asterisks indicate material from Oates' letters to me. —*G. G.*

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2. Through Looking Glasses

The pages of her fiction are crowded with gently mutating souls, persons sinking in the quicksand of their own digressions, of too many facts and details, or drowning in the very forms they constructed to remind them who they were. The 'crazy' rural girl in "The Census Taker," a very early story, shouts: "Mister you can't never catch up . . . half them people you got in that book are dead now or grown old or different." Lawrence Pryor, the doctor in a recent story, "Bloodstains," thinks of his friends, how "Their expensive homes and automobiles and boats could not quite contain them. Too much energy." In Oatesland, bits and pieces of this dangerous energy are constantly breaking off, flying wildly out into other orbits, causing fateful, sometimes fatal, collisions. Daughters break out of expensive upstairs bedrooms and run off with people like Jules Wendell (*in them*) or Simon (in "How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Correction and Began My Life Over Again") or Noel (in her new novel, *Wonderland*), unsafe, shadowy men from 'out there,' where everything is dangerous because it is changing and unpredictable, where there are always "small warnings of frost, soot warnings, traffic warnings, hazardous lake conditions for small craft and swimmers, restless Negro gangs, restless cloud formations, restless temperatures aching to fall out the very bottom of the thermometer or shoot up over the top and boil everything over in red mercury."

Is the chaos "out there," or is it in art itself? Here is Richard Everett, the child narrator of *Expensive People*, writing his memoir of how he came to murder his beautiful, talented mother, Nada. At the moment he is digressing on art: ". . . The whole thing is an accident, the art product an accident, like the products of violent seizures of nausea that overtake many of us after an arduous dinner. The work could have come out in any form, but it happened to come out in one form, and that form has crystallized and seems now, hundreds of years later, somehow planned." This might be Oates herself speaking, as she often seems to merge with her protagonists in search of a form called literature.

At other times, her characters go in search of a form called life and, in the act of trying to limit the accidents, the chaos, mop up the bloodstains at least, they find themselves implicated. *"No you don't, no dying tonight, not on my hands!"* thinks Jesse Vogel, the doctor-protagonist in *Wonderland*, when a man who has slashed his testicles in the Palmer House is brought bleeding like a pig into the emergency room. *"Nobody is going to die tonight if I can help it.* Mopping himself off, he looked around the messy room, its glinting metallic surfaces, its splatterings of blood that were like exclamation marks, and everything seemed to him manageable now, in his power, a sacred area he had mastered."

Not quite. The man does not die. But the mysterious and beautiful blond woman who came in with him, then disappeared, "strokes of blood on her face like faint watercolor brush strokes," haunts Jesse. He meets her again years later, follows her to an artists' colony in Wisconsin where she is living with another man. Jesse, married and a father, offers in an obsessive moment to "begin all over again" with her. She stipulates that they make it symbolic: she will go upstairs and break the news to her lover and take a bath, Jesse will go back to his tourist court and shave and bathe and make himself ready for her. They will meet, brand new people, having shed their old histories, in one hour.

What happens? Jesse goes back to the tourist court. He's forgotten his razor. He finds a rusty blade in the medicine cabinet and tries to shave without a razor. Suddenly his perception shifts and he sees his face in a new way. He cuts himself, once, twice, then nicks his body experimentally till blood is streaming from a dozen unconnected places. He has slipped from one form of reality into another (from Shaving-to-Begin-Again-with-this-Woman to A Cartography of My Face) and in this new form the woman is literally forgotten. Jesse gets back in the car and drives home to his family in Chicago.

What would Count Vronsky think of such a digression in his twentieth-century counterpart? Remember Vronsky, *already* shaved and riding to his liaison in a glowing awareness of the exact boundaries of his body, of his life? No getting lost for *him* in the bumps and crevices of his face.

TWO TRYSTS: A COMPARISON

". . .[Vronsky] had never loved himself, and his body, so much as now. It gave him pleasure to feel the slight pain in his powerful leg, pleasure to feel the muscles of his chest moving as he breathed. The same bright and chilly August day that had made Anna feel so hopeless seemed to him excitingly invigorating, and refreshed his face and neck, still glowing from his brisk rubdown. The aroma of the brilliantine on his mustache seemed to him particularly agreeable in this fresh air. Everything he saw through the window of the carriage . . . was just as fresh, gay, and vigorous as he was himself . . . It was all beautiful, like a lovely landscape just painted and varnished."

—*Anna Karenina*

"In the mirror Jesse's living body faced him, the living surface of his soul: an opaque feverish form straining at its limits, hovering in the yellowish mirror of this room. The skin clammy, as if with terror . . . His skin, which looked good enough at a distance of inches, was really a fanciful conglomeration of colors, the pigment mottled, like a quilt, all bumps and tiny hills and goose-pimples and hair and moles and formations that were exotic and unintelligible like something shaped by the warm caressing currents of the sea, or of the wind."

—*Wonderland*

The perspectives of both lovers are equally real, but Vronsky's vision is framed in the intention of the moment and partakes of his sense of himself as a defined, finished being from his brilliantined mustache to the leg beneath his boot. Whereas Jesse's vision of himself breaks up into a microscopic rendering of the terrain of his face, a mysterious terrain. Vronsky's view of himself as he goes to meet Anna is integrated and he can remain firm in his intention. Jesse's becomes disintegrated and he forgets Reva altogether.

Oates characters frequently lose themselves somewhere in the interstices between their shifts in vision which one reader (Neil Kleinman) has called their *bioptic tics.* This tic changes the relationship of the eye to a particular

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universe and may drastically alter everything. There can be the *bi*-optic, with its double vision or its radically-shifting movement between visions. Such movement between perspectives, between layers of existence, carries, of course, associations with biopsy, the excision of a piece of living tissue for microscopic examination. An Oates character moves along in his ordinary world when suddenly, as though he had re-focused his eyes, he blinks and finds himself in a totally different world with new co-ordinates, new rules. He inhabits a new universe, with the same perils and the same derangements of perception as that inhabited by a Gulliver in Laputa or an Alice in her Wonderland. The body seems altered, or the world around him seems altered; his consciousness seems changed, or the consciousness of others is lost. In short, everything is strange, different. The doctor in "Bloodstains", sitting in the park between appointments, sees an elegant woman cross the street. Then he realizes it is his own wife. He gets up and starts to go after her, say hello, then decides against it and sits down again, feeling oddly pleased and excited. He feels as if something secret has been revealed to him, a miracle. ("Women, seen like this, were gifts to men.")

Helene, Jesse's wife in *Wonderland*, is undergoing a routine pregnancy examination by a respected doctor and friend of her father. Suddenly she can't remember his name. He is "a man, late middle age, a stranger, with this thing stuck inside her body. It was metallic and sharp. Now he was opening it, spreading her body wider . . . .the most secret veins of her body were open to the air of this impersonal room. Her head began to move, slowly at first, from side to side. She could not stop it. *No. No.* She did not want this thing inside her, she did not want a baby, she did not want a husband, she did not want to be completed . . ."

Years later, Jesse's daughter Shelley (who has run away to Toronto with a Manson-type) writes her father of her experience with an illustrated *Alice in Wonderland* as a child: "I sat with it up on the table before me . . . reading the paragraphs one by one and trying not to fall into them and lose myself, trying not to feel terror, *it's only a book*; staring at the drawings of this girl with the long, long neck and the straggly hair and the wild enlarged eyes, the girl reduced to the size of a mouse, sailing through the air dragged by the red queen's hand, sitting at the end of a banquet table while legs of mutton waddled down toward her to eat her . . ."

> "One review ended by describing me with . . . 'a pale, bright bird's face on a long neck.' Most reviews dwell on my long neck, and I had somehow come to enjoy, a little, the giraffe image summoned up; now suddenly I must re-assess myself and think of beaks, feathers, beady little eyes, set on opposite sides of my nose, I mean beak."*

In the novel *them*, Maureen Wendell's nightschool professor offers to give her a ride home. This man, in a period of his life where he is clouded by weariness and baffled by the touching familiarity of his family ("He had married to settle himself into a certain life . . . he had wanted to come to the end of uncertainty.") enters Maureen's apartment and is lost forever to his own history. "He had followed her to this particular house, which was nowhere. Metaphorically it stood for nowhere. Its essence was nowhere, nothing. It had no being. They were meeting now upon an X which was located at no particular spot in the universe, and they seemed in terror to be recognizing each other." He loses sight of the familiar shapes that define his everyday world and, in doing so, loses his past. He marries Maureen.

> turning into another person
> we have the look
> of living
> of beginning again
> in a new latitude
> —"Turning into Another Person"
>
> "I am so spiritually exhausted by all the abuse and acclaim that I would like to arrange a funeral for 'Joyce Carol Oates' and escape with the bit of protoplasm I have, in what's left of this body I somehow got born into, to some foreign place . . ."*

3. *The Phantasmagoria of Personality*

Here is the brilliant Dr. Perrault speaking (Jesse is now his chief resident surgeon): "What is personality? I will tell you, it is a conscious system of language. And when the language deteriorates, as it must, the personality vanishes and we have only the brute matter left – the brain and its electric impulses."

Perrault again: "The personality is not permanent. It's absolutely unstable. Therefore you find yourself working with – you might say experimenting with – a substance you naively believe to be stable, when in reality it is ephemeral. An animal has as much personality as a man."

Could this be Oates, the novelist, speaking through Perrault, the neurosurgeon, about the difficulties of rendering 'characters', complete personalities, in modern fiction?

> "This book is for all of us who pursue the phantasmagoria of personality."
> —dedication to *Wonderland*

Again and again I am intrigued by this problem of character and personality in the work of Joyce Carol Oates. Her people elude me, they involve me in certain brain waves of their lives, then slip very suddenly through the molecules of their shapeshifting environment, an environment determined largely by small warnings, hazardous conditions, restless temperatures, unpredictable happenings.

> "There are days in my life that are whirlwinds of nonsense, filled with flying grit and molecules of poisonous gas and telephone calls and letters . . ."*

Who are they, were they? Take Jesse, the protagonist of *Wonderland*. I see him first as a boy, Jesse Harte, the sole surviving member of a family gunned down by a melancholy father in upstate New York. Next he becomes Jesse Pedersen, the adopted son of wealthy, eccentric Dr. Pedersen who believes that "The living organism strives to become God. I am striving, straining . . ." Then Jesse is

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pronounced 'dead' by Dr. Pedersen when he tries to help Mrs. Pedersen escape her husband. Now Jesse is a medical student. He has changed his name to that of his grandfather: Vogel. Now he is a husband. Now a father. Suddenly he is a famous neurosurgeon, busy, abstracted. His wife Helene wanders one night into his empty study and looks through his things, trying to place this stranger. She thinks she is being destroyed and annihilated by him. ("He could not imagine her, had not the time to imagine her existence, and so he was destroying her.") Now Jesse is off to Toronto, pursuing his runaway daughter. The man she has run away with, Noel, tells her that she can forget her father, free herself of his personality, by dreaming back over him, his face and his voice, and erasing as she dreams.

The last I see of Jesse is in Canada, drifting in a boat, his daughter dying, perhaps dead, in his arms. "Where were they all going, these people who abandoned him," he thinks. "Was there a universe of broken people, flung out of their orbits but still living, was there perhaps a Jesse there already in that void, the true, pure, undefiled Jesse, who watched this struggling Jesse with pity?"

Reading Oates inundates me with questions about personality, human relationships, the describing of these things in fiction. What about all this 'erasing' and 'imagining' others? Erasing and imagining ourselves? Is Perrault right? Is personality a system of language, a big sprawling novel we are writing about ourselves, but nothing to do with reality? If we had to stop (could we?) speaking and describing ourselves and others, would there be nothing more left than the brute matter of the brain and its electric impulses?

Is there a kind of novel, a perfectly respectable jet-age kind of novel, which would pretend to no more than the charting of these impulses like an encephalograph? Is this kind of novel being written already, by Joyce Carol Oates, perhaps?

Or is there a basic personality, a 'true, pure, undefiled' character, still possible in fiction, a creature that is subject to the usual accidents of existence but who subordinates his terrain as he progresses through time and space, as Vronsky travelled to Anna, cutting a swath that is always meaningful in retrospect?

I think that Oates' latest novel, *Wonderland*, is a serious, multi-voiced dialogue with herself on this question, and I look forward to its continuation.

—*Gail Godwin*

The Desolation Game

Play It As It Lays, by Joan Didion. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95

In the long tradition of novels about the beautiful-and-doomed, leading characters are always poor little rich people, sensitive souls who are gifted and intelligent, yet – for reasons not always made clear – also neurotically unhappy, unloved, and, ultimately, Lost. Their stories characteristically take the form of a long, painful swan song, a slow-motion orgy of self-pity and self-destruction. Fitzgerald, who knew the condition well, called it "emotional bankruptcy." Literary manifestations go far back, perhaps to *Manon Lescaut*; in our time one thinks, at random, of Styron's Peyton Loftis, of Wyatt Gwyon in *The Recognitions*, of William Goldman's boys and girls together, of many of Joyce Carole Oates' characters. At first glance, *Play It As It Lays* looks like another cool, clever, hip addition to the genre.

The book is also vulnerable to comparison with soap opera. The correspondences are almost too close: Miss Didion's central character, Maria

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Wyeth, was once a young girl from a small mining town in Nevada, who, it would seem, has found splendor and success as New York model, movie actress, and, in succession, wife of an up-and-coming Hollywood director. She has not, of course, found happiness. To these basic ingredients of afternoon tv, add 1) a retarded daughter, now institutionalized; 2) a lingering affair with a New York writer, resumed just long enough to conceive another child; 3) an ensuing abortion; 4) a divorce and attempted reconciliation; 5) at least one suicide; and 6) token pot-smoking, pill-popping, and other fun-and-games among the Beautiful People of the film-flam set. The technique, too, has become fashionable: a tough stance; incongruous details ("she would never: ball at a party, do S-M unless she wanted to, borrow furs from Abe Lipsey, deal"); hard, brittle prose that throbs and pounds but never falters, like the backslope of an amphetamine high; "smart" dialogue and short, cinematic scenes. Here, for example, is Chapter 8 in its entirety:

> "You haven't asked me how it went after we left Anita's," BZ said.
>
> "How did it go," Maria said without interest.
>
> "Everybody got what he came for."
>
> "Don't you ever get tired of doing favors for people?"
>
> There was a long silence. "You don't know how tired," BZ said.

Such excisions, however, are unfair, if not entirely misleading. The very strength of the book is that the author has taken her chances with material and technique – has, in effect, played it as it lays – and come up a winner. In the chronical of Maria Wyeth's emotional dismemberment, in her total and unremitting drive toward self-doom, *Play It As It Lays* is as close as we come to classic tragedy these days, taut as a spasmed nerve and as real as a needle in the vein.

As the location for endless existential films about itself, the scene is one we've come to know all too well: miles of concrete slab, fake-posh motels, a lush jungle of giant signs, power lines, prole-food huts, supermarket seraglios, hustlers of every stripe, fad-crazed children of all ages, a place where people watch themselves on television to be sure they're still all right. Miss Didion knows the place and the populace, and much of the book's success derives from her instinct for people in their surroundings, her ability to bring it all into focus in a few deft strokes. If the style is at times wearing and self-conscious, it is nevertheless authentic, always totally involved with the story. Beneath the snap, crackle, pop of dialogue teems the stuff of our times. What finally matters is that the author is in control; she knows what she is doing, and what she is doing shows up best in her characters.

Almost all of what we need to know – which is a great deal – about Maria Wyeth's earlier life is revealed in a few pages of the first chapter. The town of Silver Wells, Nevada ("Pop. then 28, now 0"), where she grew up is linked to Maria's psychic state in this unerring sketch of its physical and spiritual desolation:

> We had a lot of things and places that came and went, a cattle ranch with no cattle and a ski resort picked up on somebody's second mortgage and a motel that would have been advantageously situated at a freeway exit had the freeway been built . . . three hundred acres of mesquite and some houses and a Flying A and a zinc mine and a Tonopah & Tidewater RR siding and a trinket shop and later . . . a midget golf course and a reptile museum and a restaurant with some slots and two crap tables.

Here we barely glimpse the child Maria, docile and oblivious to her time and place ("I never in my life had any plans"), taught to believe "that what came in on the next roll [of the dice] would always be better than what went out on the last." So too her mother, a lovely, lonely woman given to migraines and daydreams ("*cross the ocean in a silver plane*, she would croon to herself and mean it, *see the jungle when it's wet with rain*"). The primary focus here is upon her father: Harry Wyeth, gambler, small time wheeler-dealer, eternal optimist, who had "a lot of things and places that came and went." The meaning of it all coalesces in a fine vignette of Maria and her parents "driving down to Vegas in the pickup and then driving home again in the clear night, a hundred miles down and a hundred back and nobody on the highway either way, just the snakes stretched on the warm asphalt and my mother with a wilted gardenia in her dark hair and my father keeping a fifth of Jim Beam on the floorboard and talking about his plans, he always had a lot of plans . . ."

It was Maria's father who taught her that "life itself was a crap game." Said he, in the vernacular of the dice table: "It goes as it lays, don't do it the hard way." Despite her own aimlessness as an adult, her refusal to have plans, her willingness to drift and even to sink, this is advice she has trouble following. As lessons go, she says, it seems "to hold up, but not to apply." Nothing applies – and this, in its several senses, is the subject of *Play It As It Lays*.

What is the root of Maria's disaffiliation? What accounts for her marital problems, her anxieties, compulsions, phobias? The "normal" mind insists upon an explanation (else Maria Wyeth is condemned as a rebel without cause, the book dismissed as merely another scattershot polemic against "life" and "society"). But we are warned from the very beginning that "to look for 'reasons' is beside the point."

There is a temptation to find "cause" in Maria's abortion, for after she submits to her husband's demand that she undergo it, her psychosis deepens and widens in her obsession with the destroyed fetus. She imagines "hacked pieces of human flesh" in drainpipes and suffers a breakdown on the day the baby would have been born, although "she had deliberately not counted the months but she must have been counting them unawares, must have been keeping a relentless count somewhere." But the book is hardly an anti-abortion tract. The random giving of life and taking it away is paramount, but it centers more properly in the plight of Maria's first-born, four-year-old Kate, whose treatment and confinement in a mental institution has mirrored from the beginning the situation of her mother. Significantly, it is from Maria's anxieties over Kate's well-being that the "answer" ultimately derives.

At a crucial point late in the book, a friend comes to Maria bent upon a

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mutual, if tacit, suicide pact. When Maria asks why, he tells her, "Because you and I, we *know* something. Because we've been out there where nothing is." But Maria declines his offer of a way out; she is "still playing" things as they lay, still in the game. And the game goes on, even after she too has been committed to an institution. With great lucidity, she now speaks an answer to the questions both she and the reader have been asking. "The answer is 'nothing,' " she says. "The only problem is Kate. I want Kate." Moreover, having the "answer" now permits her for the first time to make plans for the future: "(1) get Kate, (2) live with Kate alone, (3) do some canning." One resists any inclination to interpret "canning." It is that, and nothing else: "You call it as you see it, and stay in the game." The act of mere preservation is a way of functioning. For Maria it is enough that "I know what 'nothing' means, and keep on playing."

Round and round we go, down and down we go: Joan Didion has that old black magic. *Play It As It Lays* is a dark, mean, and fantastic book, powerfully conceived and executed, as accurate and deadly as a blow dart dipped in curare. *–Nolan Porterfield*

Balling the Muse

Love & Fame, by John Berryman. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $6.50

"He was interested in love and money; and if he had found a combination of them in something else, he would have dedicated himself to it instead of poetry," John Berryman said of Theodore Roethke in a 1970 interview. Yet, in the same year, Berryman published his most self-aggrandizing sequence of autobiographical poems to date. The title? Echoing his own condemnation of Roethke, *Love & Fame.* It is a book which reveals Berryman's accusation to be a classic case of projection. For Berryman here clearly equates fame with love and money, and love with lust.

It is this self-aggrandizement and lack of compassion which make Berryman's confessional poetry a series of false confessions. Instead of confessing for therapeutic or purgative purposes, he appears to do so to gratify his formidable ego. Rather than displaying moral courage, his poems display instead an immoral callowness.

These characteristics were present in The Dream Songs, Berryman's long sequence of 385 poems published in two books (*77 Dream Songs,* 1964; *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest,* 1968). But they were held in check by Berryman's use of the persona of a supposedly imaginary character named Henry, sometimes addressed by his friends as Mr. Bones. This third-person device is abandoned altogether in *Love & Fame,* which partially accounts for the unprecedented breast-beating. While the Dream Songs are poems motivated by the Ego, *Love & Fame* is sheer egocentricity.

The very title *Love & Fame* sets the key. In Robert Lowell's confessional cycle, *Life Studies,* he is concerned with studies of lives. Anne Sexton weighs the heavy alternatives, *Live or Die.* But Mr. Berryman – well, Mr. Berryman, alas, is toting up his relative successes in bed and in the fame game.

About Love Mr. Berryman seems to know sadly little, though of lust he writes a lot. The poems literally attest to his status as a "sexual athlete" (his words, not ours.) There are poems on his researches into the size of women's breasts, on cunnilingus ("I sucked your hairs"), on his 20-year-old fantasy to "satisfy at once all Barnard & Smith / & have enough left over for Miss Gibbs's girls." The poet-protagonist (and the book seems to closely parallel Berryman's autobiography), brags in one poem that he has been "fiddling . . . with every wife / on the Eastern seaboard". In another, that he has made out a list of his sexual conquests: "it came to 79". So much for love. We would suggest that this catalog of sexual performances without passion or personal commitment to other higher values than satisfying the itch is indicative of the poet's total lack of committment to other higher values as well.

About Fame Mr. Berryman is equally boastful. The point of one poem seems to be that Elizabeth Bishop, a writer he regards as our best lyricist since Emily Dickinson, once sent him a fan letter. Another informs the reader that Alumni Berryman does not send Columbia University any money: "They use my name / Now and Then. That's plenty." A third contains an 8-line put-down of a minor American poet (Creeley) in the form of a letter written by Berryman from his seat on Parnassus. The letter would best have remained unpublished.

Being famous, of course, provides opportunities for the poet to meet others famous. Berryman, we fear, is guilty of dropping names, however, and always on a first-name basis so the reader can see how very well he knows them. He mentions Saul (Bellow), Mark (Van Doren), Delmore (Schwartz) and a host of others. This might seem an unfair charge: After all, if these men were his friends, why shouldn't he mention them? Unfortunately, such charity does not explain the mentality which is not only thrilled by, but moved to write a poem about, the fact that "Anthony Eden passed within ten feet of me." The truth appears to be, Berryman is guilty of the sin of *hubris,* a trait which has been the downfall of greater men. Here he brags as much about his friendships as he does his money. Unlike the Aristotelian hero, however, Berryman's pride is not a trait which will thrill the reader with horror or melt him to pity. The reader may be a little disgusted, though. Berryman might well heed Wallace Stevens' dictum: "Life is not people and scene, but thought and feeling."

Let us invoke another poet: It was Robert Graves who coined the aphorism, "If there is no money in poetry, neither is there poetry in money." But because Berryman has been fortunate enough to disprove the first half of that statement, he takes the second half to be equally false. So he writes poems about receiving "elephant cheques" for his readings and books, and once, in discussing children and high art, feels compelled to add,

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"Money in the bank is also something."

If the amount of money a poet makes seems a supremely trivial topic for poetry, it is absolutely Olympian when compared to some of Berryman's others. He writes of losing the vice-presidency of his college class "by five bare bitter votes". One poem is on getting a C in a course at Columbia – which occasion put him "squarely in the middle of Hell." These could be topics for poems, of course: ironic or sprightly light verse by John Betjeman; or deliberately deprecating and played-down lines by Philip Larkin. But in Berryman's heavy hands they are at best mawkish: Is receiving a C in a course, really, sufficient impetus to place a soul "squarely in the middle of Hell"? Is the poet guilty of overwriting, or – worse – of failing to see through the personal experience to the poetic experience? Time and again, Berryman seems unwilling to sacrifice the personal meaning to the poetic meaning.

Berryman's questionable topics might be elevated by superior poetics. But his rhetoric and glib abbreviations and slang help not at all. We single out two bad puns as examples of his poetic offenses. The first is perpetuated when the poet engages in intercourse with (we can't say "makes love to") a woman who is menstruating. He chortles, "So there on my floor she did her bloody best." Indeed. The second, within another poem about intercourse, has the poet lament, "O this has been a long long night of wrest." The spirit of Ogden Nash lives!

Moreover, there seem to be no memorable images or metaphors in *Love & Fame*, nothing to compare with, say, Mrs. Sexton's "Life is a kitten in a sack." Weighing the 497 pages of his last three books, Berryman might do well to remember Ezra Pound's, "It is better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works."

All that has gone wrong can be examined in the book's first poem, "Her & It". The "it" ultimately is fame, and how it gets in the way of the poet's recovering his past. But initially "it" also seems to be the vagina of a girl the poet once knew. The poet in times past, it seems, was in love with "a gash", a disembodied cunt. In stanza one he conjectures that this "gash" must now have "seven lousy children" – though why the children should be lousy is not indicated. This immediately leads to the parenthetical confession, "(I've three myself, one being off the record.)" In the fourth line, Berryman already sandbags us with an unnecessary confidence, an irrelevant posture of supermasculinity.

The second stanza is offensive for a different reason: The poet wishes the girl would write to him because, "After all, I get letters from anybody." (Later in the book he admits to a letter from the White House.) The famous poet brags on his correspondence; The Old Woman Displays Her Medals. Stanza three continues the *hubris:* the poet is flying East "to sing a poem", and although it is decades since he has seen the girl, he will look for her when the "Admirers . . . surge up afterward."

The fourth contains the offensive decription of Berryman's "elephant cheques", plus the observation that his *Dream Songs* are selling well in Tokyo and Paris, and that his publishers are very fond and friendly both in New York and in London.

In the fifth stanza the poet compares his reputation with that of Saul (Bellow, of course, but unidentified further). Berryman also lets the reader know he himself was in *Time* magazine the year before, with "Photographs all over!" Don't miss that exclamation point, either.

The poem concludes with the promising line, "She muttered something in my ear I've forgotten as we danced." Promising, because for the first time in a poem titled "Her & It", we finally have a portrayal of the "her" in a human (as opposed to a dehumanized) way. The poem's missed potentialities are for a moving contrast between human relations when one is an unknown lover and when one is a famous poet. But all the bravura and insecurities of the narrator have stood between him and the unrealized poem.

Further, one cannot examine that final line too long without realizing that even the convoluted rhetoric, which has become Berryman's signature, actually bars direct communication. Clearly, the girl muttered something in his ear as they danced, which he has since forgotten. But as the line stands, the girl muttered something in his ear, and he has now forgotten it as he danced. Besides, did she really mutter something (while) *in* his ear, or did she mutter something *into* his ear?

And so it goes, poem after poem. The last section of the book, "Eleven Addresses to the Lord", is so superior to the rest that it almost saves it. But it comes too late, and the eleven are too few, their pieties ludicrously contrasting with the impious 84 pages which precede.

John Simon once titled a review of Philip Booth's *Letter from a Distant Land*, "Postcard from around the Corner". Perhaps this review of *Love & Fame* should be captioned, "Lust & Notoriety". In any event, in this latest of Berryman's books of confessional poetry he doesn't confess, he merely gossips about himself.

–Robert Phillips

Doing Good = Being Good

On Doing Good / The Quaker Experiment, by Gerald Jonas. Scribner's. $5.95

"Convinced Friends" are supposed to be more intense about their belief than "birthright Friends." Speaking as a convinced Friend, one who joined the Quakers as a deliberate choice, I am especially conscious of the fact that Gerald Jonas is an outsider explaining the inner workings of Quakerism to the rest of the world. He makes a few oversimplifications that grate on the mind of one who has thought long before joining. But as a sympathetic outsider, Jonas has taken the trouble to read Quaker history and study Quaker practice. He shows a deeper understanding and a more detailed expertise than is probably true for most Quakers.

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But the book is ambiguous. Jonas gives us Quakers at work, describes their programs, seems to think that on balance the Quaker way of social change might be a model of peaceful revolution, yet he says little about why Quakers act as they do. He quotes from individual statements of principle, perhaps intending to imply that such work requires committed men. But he rests his case on a description of Quaker programs.

A short first section, hardly a chapter (the book is only 177 generously printed pages), called "The Argument," sketches contemporary views on social change. Jonas polarizes these views, alternatives between despairing inaction and violent revolution, and suggests Quaker action as a synthesis between opposed theses. He is intellectual. The suggested synthetic hypothesis requires him to disprove the popular assumption that Quakerism never really worked but was only a pious masquerade for business as usual.

The first chapter, "Roots," gives a brief historical sketch of the origins of Quakerism, then becomes more detailed in discussing the controversy between Quaker and other settlers about the right way to treat the Indians. Did the Quaker refusal to make war only make it easier for Indians to attack settlers? Were the Indians just biding their time during the 75-year truce in Pennsylvania?

Jonas becomes contemporary in the next two chapters. "Cases" deals mainly with the work of the Chicago chapter of the American Friends Service Committee in the area of housing. "Community" has many topics, with a theme tied to the relation between Quakerism and the state, where laws conflict with conviction: abolition, conscription, and war relief in Viet Nam, with one section on the Black Power attack on Quaker programs. The main focus is on the Committee because it is the group that combines the many individual Quaker concerns into a policy and a set of programs for public action.

As a practicing journalist (his book first appeared in *The New Yorker*), Jonas looks for dramatic contrasts and embodies his theme in conflicts. This practice is good as far as it leads to concrete illustration from people and events. But it tends to make factitious distinctions that clutter the field. In the historical section, Jonas uses the term "Quaker" for exemplars of widely different practices. True, many people called themselves Quakers who exploited the Indians greedily, including Penn's trusted agent, James Logan, and at least one Penn son. Jonas contrasts these with the pure life of John Woolman, always active in abolition and in trying to settle Indian disputes. Logan died very rich; Woolman gave up his business when it began to prosper too well.

Jonas makes the contrast into a parable for America. Our spiritual greatness continually falters before our physical greed. Jonas appears to believe that this hypocritical dichotomy was present in the founding doctrines of Quakerism. He implies that Logan is as much a Quaker as Woolman, that they are opposite extremes of an ineluctable psychomachia hampering the social effectiveness of Quakers acting as a group. Jonas is intellectual. He sees things in terms of forces and trends.

I will indulge a contrast of my own. Jonas notes that Penn, "as a man of his time," accepted the enjoyment of property as an inalienable right, like trial by peers and free worship. But I contend that however unconsciously Penn may have entertained incompatible ideas, Quakers as a group had thought through this particular paradox of the desire for property and the duty to serve mankind.

In 1675 the Scots Friend Robert Barclay published *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, a vindication of the doctrines of Quakers, who were then under strong persecution in England. The book had a wide vogue and became a Quaker classic. One accusation against Friends was that they held their property in common, like the Levelers and other communitarian sects of the time. Barclay explains that Friends respect the principle of property because they disapprove of indiscriminate leveling. And yet the well-to-do must help the poor. Barclay denies the claim that only cloistered communities can exercise group charity because men in the world are soiled by possessions. To the contrary, he reminds his readers that God gave us the creation to use for our growth and our service to God through mutual aid. It is fit that the more able have control of more of the creation. But only to share it better. The desire for property is natural and pious. The profit motive is interdicted to give way to the use of wealth for service.

So far then as a Quaker became individualistic and proprietary about his possessions, he was less a Quaker, and he knew it. James Logan was not a Quaker at all, but an avowed profiteer using his Quaker status as a cynical mask. John Woolman was a true Quaker, one of the best we have known. But is this to say anything more than the fact that Woolman was a good man and Logan was a canting sinner? I think not, except to make the point that there was no hidden ambivalence in Quaker ideas about the use of wealth. When Quakers fell away from their own doctrines, it was for the usual reasons, a habit of success and a disinclination to search the heart. But from time to time they return to the fount of their inspiration. Jonas is fascinated by these returns, but he does not quite see what is the nature of the fount.

I do not see that Jonas really knows Quaker faith. He seems to accept the idea, common among historians, that Quakerism is one more of the many Protestant sects spawned by social unrest in the seventeenth century. Probably the times favored George Fox's message, and to dwell on historical detail would impede Jonas' theme. Yet the Quakers are no Protestants, and to think so is to miss the answer to a question that Jonas asks without finding an answer: why the Quakers have been more active in the world than the other peace churches with whom they are historically compared.

A Protestant faith requires perdition. Protestantism accepts the dark view of man. Hopelessly sinning, he can only be saved by grace. But this is a comfortable creed. One is expected to be imperfect and to console himself with imperfect benefits drawn from this world's goods. Crude and unfair as it sounds, that is the logic of the theology of Protestantism, at least as practiced in America, where Reinhold Niebuhr is better known than Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

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The historic peace churches, Mennonites and Brethren, have retained the Protestant theology of the churches they splintered from. I think, too, that many nominal Quakers are really Protestants, with their concern about investments and their faith in individualism. They would say that another view is unrealistic or sanctimonious. They are a conscientious and gathering sort of men.

The Quaker is downright and unambiguous. He believes that God never demands more than man can do, because every man, far from being steeped in Original Sin, has a particle of divinity in him. Man's duty is to build a unity of the human spirit as brothers under God. Such a Johannine view of duty dispenses with conscience. Heaven lies about us to be made. There is no logic, no theology, nothing but a desire to throw down barriers between men – not to do good, but to assist at its creation.

Such at least is the inspiration to which Quakers return when they feel a quickening of the spirit. Such is the tradition in their committees on suffering and on social concerns. Such is the recurring motive when the American Friends Service Committee reexamines its policy. To call it exclusively Quaker would be unbearably self-righteous. It is, however, more akin to an ethical creed like Buddhism than to Protestantism. Yet Buddhism does not accept the creation as an avenue for growth and service as do the Friends. First and last, Quakerism is a religion, welling up from the faith of separate believers groping toward community like Gandhi in his experiments with universal truth.

At one point Jonas says that conscientious attack on specific evils is "the essence of true liberalism – as well as the kernel of the modern scientific method." But his comparison moves away from faith. No conscience is involved, only immediate individual responses to social needs, prompted by a sensitivity to suffering as a sign of human unity. Quakers use the conscience like everyone else, but not in ultimate situations. Their constant appeal to a divine motive in man looks like the scientific method, but only to the extent that the Quaker tests each new situation by the Inner Light. He is no more concerned to draw up rules of conduct than was Gandhi.

Jonas is particularly interested, in chapter two, in the way the American Friends Service Committee inspires the founding of other self-help groups. The Chicago chapter of the Committee, working with Dr. King's Christian Leadership Conference, helped form the East Garfield Park Tenants Union, which quickly grew to city-wide and than to nation-wide scope, with its first national leader drawn from the Committee's chapter in Chicago.

In chapter three, Jonas traces the increasing willingness of the Committee to give up bureaucratic control of money and property in community relations, as in its cooperation with Black Power in Boston. Then he goes on to show the origins of the decision to risk the establishment status of the Committee by breaking laws in sending medicine to civilians in North Viet Nam and in expanding draft counseling services to the point of advising how to resist the conscription system. The Committee has been anxious to avoid any seeming conformity with militarist and exploitative systems, and in the true tradition of non-violence has announced its actions. Jonas reprints the announcement.

The American Friends Service Committee has purified itself through a return to basic Quaker doctrines about property, growth in the world, and dedication of gain to social service. It has published studies (detailed by Jonas) on non-violent alternatives in national defense. It has met the fierce intransigence of the dispossessed in our slums without being bullied or expecting gratitude. It has decided to continue to use concerned staff members rather than become a professional social service group. The main service it can provide is the spectacle of private individuals working to create community because they believe the only revolution that lasts is in separate people coming together.

Jonas appears to hope for a more explicit program: "Any society that tolerates . . . inequities . . . contains within itself the seeds of destruction. But the . . . institutions that will make it possible for imperfect men to govern equitably in a prosperous community remain to be created." Whatever his own beliefs, Jonas here seems to echo a Protestant work ethic that tolerates the cause of its own failures. I am not intellectual enough to believe in principles and institutions. As a convinced Friend, I can only believe that all men truly desire unity and that I can strive to set an example. There is no group mystique of doing good. You just have to be good.

–John Lindberg

Reasons to Kill

Death as a Way of Life, by Roger Caras. Little, Brown. $5.95

The Wolf, by L. David Mech. Natural History Press. $9.95

Innocent Killers, by Hugo and Jane van Lawick-Goodall. Houghton Mifflin. $10.00

The act of killing is one of the most fascinating behavioral events known to man. Manifestations of this interest can be found on the front page of every newspaper and as the central theme of many novels and plays. In a sense the act may be a fundamental driving force paradoxically psychologically motivating the life process itself. It must certainly play a role in generating interest in prize fights, auto races, football games, hunts, and wars. In one form or another it seems to occupy an essential niche in the psychology of man. Philosophers, educators and religious prophets have attempted to create value systems de-emphasizing its most negative aspects. The best attempts have often resulted in failure and killing – as testified to by the Cross and the cup of hemlock.

Explorations into the nature and origin of the killing instinct have been conducted by ethologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. Some students have suggested that its origins

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lay in the predator-prey relationships established by primitive man, the hunter. Others have suggested that it arose from agonistic behavior stemming from some such instinct as territoriality. Regardless of origin, killing had survival value and played a necessary role in the Darwinian world from which man has evolved. Some question its value in a future, artificial, man-regulated system.

Jane van Lawick-Goodall, of chimpanzee behavior fame, and her husband Hugo have taken advantage of man's fascination with killing in writing their colorful book, *Innocent Killers.* This is a typical Lorenzian study of three canines of Africa – the hyena, jackal, and Cape hunting dog. The study was conducted near the Leakey Camp at Olduvai Gorge and is concerned primarily with placing the killing instinct of these animals in its proper perspective.

The book presents these animals in their natural setting and thus represents many hours of field study and photography. All of these canines kill for survival and are secondarily scavengers. They hunt in pairs or small family groups and the gory details of their predation is revealed in candid detail as attested by Jane's statement, "That was the first hyena hunt that Hugo and I watched and we were horrified to see ourselves, how they ate their prey alive . . . Wild dogs and jackals also kill by this method of rapid disembowelment."

The Goodalls' book links the killing instinct to the animal's biological needs and also points out that these predators serve their prey as population regulators, preventing mass starvation and disease. This concept is most vividly portrayed in describing the carnage of predators during the herbivore calving season. Their killing is vital to the scheme of things in Africa.

In a similar vein, David Mech's book, *The Wolf*, takes the same but less colorful approach in an excellently documented account of wolf behavior. Mech characterizes wolves as peaceful animals, living in small family units and attacking man only under the most unusual circumstances. The interesting account of the social bonds formed by wolves dispels the Lorenzian hypothesis that dogs evolved from jackals. Agonistic behavior is found within the pack but seldom results in killing members of the pack. According to Mech, there is evidence that Lorenz's interpretation concerning a subordinate wolf exposing his jugular to inhibit the killer tendencies of a dominant wolf, is incorrect. The usual mode of appeasement in wolves is to roll over on their backs and expose their abdomens. It is now interpreted by some workers that it is the dominant wolf that exposes his jugular in a type of "I dare you" display.

In both books it is interesting to note that the aggressive instinct is primarily suppressed in canines during encounters with members of the familial unit. Attacks are made on individuals where social bonds have not been formed either in early development or during periods of mating.

The killer instinct in wolves has been shown to be lethally productive only in one-in-ten predator-prey encounters, indicating that only weak or undesirable individuals are preyed upon. In the Royal Isle studies, twinning in moose was selected-for by predation pressure. The wolves, like the canines of Africa, play an important role in maintaining species vigor and vitality in their prey.

Mech concludes his book with concern for the killing instinct in man, which is not linked to the need for food and which is resulting in the unnecessary elimination of the wolf. Man's insatiable killing instinct, coupled with weapon technology that increases his kill-encounter ratio, provides a frightening preview for the future of wolves.

A noted naturalist, Roger Caras, in *Death as a Way of Life*, philosophically explores this aggressive tendency in man. The book is intended to raise more questions than it answers in probing the innermost motives that compel men to hunt and kill. It is not written as a criticism of all hunters, but as a condemnation of those who think they are hunters.

Caras really has no criticism of the hunter who finds consolation in communing with nature, who is satisfied with restricted kills, and who has a conscientious, responsible empathy for the species he hunts – although he hastens to point out that shooting animals with a camera instead of a gun can provide the same satisfaction as hunting, except for the exhilaration of the kill. Caras is suspicious of those that find excitement in killing itself, like the hunter quoted as saying, "I like the excitement of killing, you get a feeling of accomplishment when you kill."

The naturalist is also repulsed by people of stature killing excessive numbers of animals with armored convoys, radios, and machine guns. He is also concerned about the National Rifle Association's somewhat tacit approval of running down game in vehicles. Some current "sports" magazines are carrying increasing numbers of advertisements encouraging the use of gadgets that take the *hunt* out of hunting and accent the kill.

The establishment of game preserves has provided a profile of the motives of many so-called hunters, in that the most successful operations provide hunters with a maximum number of kills for a minimum amount of energy expended. This is done by hypocritically "tricking" them into believing that they are not killing caged birds. Some preserves, with a shrewd understanding of the psychology of the clientele, plant birds along well marked paths with white flags marking the position of the bird so that the "hunter" will be sure to kill his quarry.

Caras is concerned for the future of wildlife because of the prevailing attitudes of many hunters. He feels that man does not always operate at the level of the insect, but that there are areas of behavior where he is possibly a prisoner of his past heritage. He hopes for a time when there will be more men around who finally realize that they are not hunters or sportsmen by any stretch of the imagination. They are just killers acting out their atavistic urges. With cheap weapons readily available, a diminishing wildlife supply, and a possible atavistic urge linked not to purely biological but to psychological needs, one cannot help but feel concern about the future of man. Who really is the big bad wolf and who really is the innocent killer? *–A. C. Haman*

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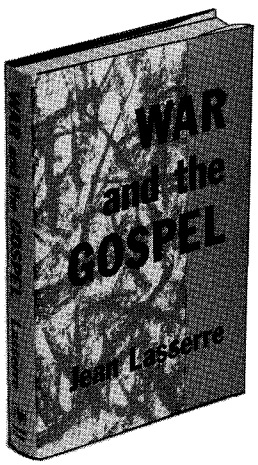
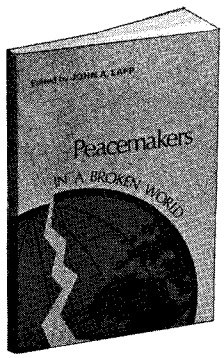
WAR AND THE GOSPEL
by Jean Lasserre

A book for those with questions concerning the extent to which a Christian can or should participate in warfare. Defense of country, responsibility to the state, the lordship of Christ, the sixth commandment, and responsibility for the brother are a few of the subjects discussed. First published in French, then German, and now available in the English language. 243 pages, 18 pages references, 7 pages bibliography.

8361-1475-2: $5.00





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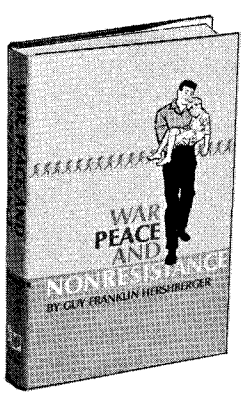

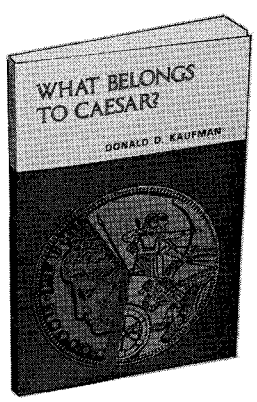

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by Donald D. Kaufman

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Gerald Weales

THEATRE JOURNAL

Nostalgia and Beyond

When Gloria Swanson took over the mother's role in *Butterflies Are Free*, Walter Kerr went back to see the Leonard Gershe play and reported that her performance was "excellent, non-nostalgic work" (*The New York Times*, September 19, 1971). Yet, a few weeks later, the *Times* (October 10) printed one of those gushy, neo-*Modern Screen* interviews to which the "Arts and Leisure" section of that paper is so devoted ("Oh, what most female septuagenarians wouldn't give to look like Swanson, at 11 o'clock at night after a hard day's work"), an article that, perhaps accidentally, made it quite clear that it was nostalgia as much as art that put Swanson's name up in lights again. Since I do not share Kerr's affection for *Butterflies* (for me, it is a standard Broadway comedy, unredeemed by the fact that its hero is blind), I have no intention of going to see how Eileen Heckart's lethal mama is reshaped in Swanson's gentle hands. Besides, if it is nostalgia I want, I have plenty of transplanted movie stars to choose from.

As I write this, New York is full of ladies who glittered on the silver screen during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s: Joan Blondell, Alexis Smith, Ruby Keeler, Yvonne De Carlo, Anne Baxter, Fifi D'Orsay, Patsy Kelly, Jane Russell. Some of them are playing roles that depend not at all on their Hollywood personalities – Swanson, Blondell in *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, Russell in *Company*. The Lauren Bacall part in *Applause* might be considered that kind of role, but now that Anne Baxter has replaced Bacall, the character cannot escape being a nostalgia turn because everyone who goes into the theater will remember that Baxter, who now plays Margo Channing, the tough, aging star, was the nasty young girl in *All About Eve* when the film on which the musical is based was released twenty-one years ago. The other performers are in one of two shows – *No, No, Nanette* or *Follies* – where their appeal depends in part on an implicit or explicit recognition that they exist in a then-and-now situation in which the youthful past necessarily peeps out of the middle-aged presence on stage. Even the actresses in roles that do not call specifically for such a doppelgänger effect cannot escape their other, early selves, for the advertisements, the interviews, the first-entrance applause keep looking backward. The clearest recognition of this came from Ginger Rogers, who traveled the musical tents last summer in a stock production of *Coco*. When I saw her at the Valley Forge Musical Fair early in September, she received a standing ovation which she answered sweetly in a curtain speech in which she said that she did not know whether she was being applauded for what she did that afternoon or what she had done in the movies long ago, but that she would accept either compliment or both as one. Of course, Ginger Rogers really was a star, as were Swanson, Blondell, Keeler, but a number of those names mentioned above – Alexis Smith, Yvonne De Carlo, Jane Russell – belonged to leading players who never quite managed the genuine glitter. In a way, their present appearances are not only using their pasts but inventing them. Although I remember Alexis Smith's given an amiable comic performance in *The Doughgirls* (1944), I certainly cannot go all soft at the thought of the actress or her movies as I might at the memory of Ginger Rogers on Fred Astaire's arm or Ruby Keeler, charmingly inept, as she tapped her way into Dick Powell's heart.

What this newly fabricated past implies is that something more than simple nostalgia is at work in the shows in which an aging, energetic present at once confirms and denies the selves that have gone before. Not that this is the wrong moment for nostalgia. God knows it is all around us. Mail order catalogues, once given away, are reprinted and sold at high prices to remind us that life was cheaper (and hence simpler?) in, say, 1897. Old comic strips are collected in book form – like the *Little Orphan Annie* volume I reviewed here in the Spring issue – and peddled to true believers. Lyda Roberti wraps her charming accent around "College Rythm" on a Columbia Hall of Fame album, just one of scores of record repressings that call up voices from the past. In New York, Philadelphia, Washington and who knows how many other cities, commercial movie houses are offering Buster Keaton, Humphrey Bogart, Greta Garbo, D. W. Griffith, Laurel and Hardy, Jean Harlow. Some of this stuff is quality goods which – like a Dickens paperback – would be welcome at any time. Some of it has turned up only to cater to everyone's middle-aged illusion that the world was as innocent as he was twenty, thirty, forty years ago. The book club that has emerged to feed this hunger makes no pretense at marketing pop-culture history; it calls itself the Nostalgia Book Club. On stage, nostalgia in its purest form is likely to be invoked either by a straightforward revival – one in which young performers play the roles once filled by other young performers, however famous now – or in shows that attempt to catch the spirit of an earlier era. I suppose the most recent example of such a re-creation is *Dames at Sea*, in which Jim Wise, George Haimsohn, and Robin Miller, fondly, their tongues just barely in their cheeks, turned out a pocket-sized show that recalled the 1930s Warner Brothers musicals; as I write this, the television production of *Dames* has yet to appear (it is scheduled for November 15), but since Ann Miller will be playing in it, I assume that it will be

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haunted by her real as well as its mythical past.

Isn't *No, No, Nanette* – "The New 1925 Musical," as the ads say – such a nostalgic revival? In a way, yes. At a time when the Broadway standard is the heavy-book show, rich with plot, psychological motivation, and social conscience, the story of *No, No, Nanette*, streamlined in Burt Shevelove's adaptation, is as happily pointless as the marital mix-up farces from which such musical books derive. Anyone who actually follows the plot will be rewarded with an unimpeachable happy ending, but the book – now, as in 1925 – is only an excuse, a frame on which to hang the songs, the dances, the comedy turns. And the tunes are some of Vincent Youman's best: "I Want to Be Happy", "Tea for Two", "You Can Dance with Any Girl". More important, it is one of the best staged, best dressed musicals to turn up in New York in years. Everything – Donald Saddler's dances, Raoul Pène du Bois's marvelous sets and costumes, even Vidal Sassoon's haircuts – contributes to a sense of period. Busby Berkeley's name on the program may also be such a contribution – although the show is more 1920s than 1930s, the dances are plainly not in Berkeley's celebrated Hollywood style, and he is rumored to have had little to do with the actual production.

So why not simply label the show "nostalgia" and let it go at that? No. Impossible. There are physical presences as well as names: Ruby Keeler and Patsy Kelly. They are cast according to age and type, fit easily into this show right now, but the echoes of all their films sound around them. Nostalgia is obviously an important element in the affectionate feeling most people my age have for Ruby Keeler, but the warm reception that the sixty-two-year-old lady gets when she steps out on stage and begins her oh so imitable tap has a somber underlay to it. After all, that is not our Ruby of *42nd Street* and *Footlight Parade;* that is Ruby Keeler almost forty years after the tapping fact. When Keeler makes her first entrance, the audience sees an attractive woman, warm and comfortable, not taking herself too seriously, and gives her a friendly welcome. Yet, there is a slight tension in the greeting. It is not until she goes into her dance, a gaggle of tapping chorus boys behind her, that the audience relaxes, smiles, exults. Thank God, she can still do it! Whether the audience is aware of it or not, what they are celebrating with Ruby Keeler is very different from the nostalgic impulse that pulls one back in time, provides an escape from a chaotic today, erases the extra weight, the bifocals, the slipped disc that are time's gifts to golden lads and girls. When Keeler dances, she is not suddenly transformed into the girl who tapped her heavy-footed happy way through *Ready, Willing and Able;* she is the well-kept matron, now out of retirement, accepting what time does to all of us and tapping up a storm all the same. What we celebrate, then, is continuation, survival, and not survival in the barely breathing sense but in the way that allows us to glimpse the young woman in the older one and know, happily, that it is the latter who is alive, energetic, vital. This can be seen even more clearly in Patsy Kelly. She plays the acid-tongued maid in *No, No, Nanette*, a variation on a hundred roles she has played before, but she moves, heavily, at a shuffle, as though she were just barely able to get around, as though the complaining voice were the only vibrant thing about her. She has no song, no dance in the show proper. Then, when the curtain calls come, she drags herself center stage and goes into the maddest dance we have seen; on her last crazy kick, she turns to the beaming Keeler and barks, "Eat your heart out." The audience goes wild. Survival.

The phenomenon is not a new one in the theater. Stars have persisted in coming out of retirement and restaking their claim to existence. In 1933, for instance, in *Roberta*, Fay Templeton, by that time too heavy to stand comfortably, sat and sang *Yesterdays* and scored a triumph – proving, among other things, how wrong Willa Cather had been when, as a young drama critic, she had written the singer off in the 1890s, on the assumption that she lacked sincerity and hence staying power. In recent years, the tempo of such returns seems to have increased, probably as a result of David Merrick's constant search for stars to go into his many companies of *Hello, Dolly!* It was Merrick who turned to our Hollywood past, bringing Ginger Rogers and Betty Grable back, as the song says, "where you belong." Later shows followed the same pattern; at various times, Ann Miller and Janet Blair played the title role in *Mame* which had originally belonged to Angela Lansbury; Danielle Darrieux, of all unlikely choices, was imported to replace Katharine Hepburn in *Coco.* What *Dolly, Mame* and *Coco* have in common – aside from their dramatic and musical dullness – is that all three are survival shows, with heroines who persist, and are therefore natural vehicles for performers with the same qualities. *

It was inevitable, given the theatrical preoccupation with old stars, old shows, that someone would take the nostalgia at face value and then call it into question. *Follies* is the result, but what it says about nostalgia is unfortunately far more sentimental, far less invigorating then what is implicit in Patsy Kelly's "Eat your heart out." The controlling gimmick of *Follies* is an interesting one, a reunion of old performers to commemorate a theater that is about to be torn down to

* It is as obvious to me as it is to the reader that the performers I am talking about in this essay are all women. One reason, I suspect, is that we have usually been less sentimental about our male stars. Only occasionally – the multiple returns of Maurice Chevalier, for instance – are we asked go mushy over the gents. Even those actresses who do not have to return because they never left – troupers like Bette Davis and Joan Crawford – are greeted with surprised awe as each new picture arrives, while their male counterparts – Henry Fonda and James Stewart, say – elicit no such reaction. I suppose we have to go outside show business to find a male variation on the phenomenon under discussion here – to the birthday parties for Pablo Picasso and P. G. Wodehouse who, at 90, are celebrated not simply for lasting but for continuing to paint and to write as they move confidently toward their second century. –*G. W.*

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make way for a parking lot. The virtues of the show are in the specialty numbers, acts presumably once performed by the gathering girls, for Stephen Sondheim has a good ear for period and can turn out a 1920s or a 1940s number with just the right touch to the music and lyrics. Unfortunately, James Goldman's soap-opera book chooses to focus on two couples for whom the reunion is the catalytic agent bringing their failed marriages to crisis. What they and their youthful selves tell us is that the promises of twenty turn to losses at fifty — news from all over! — but not even a clever integration of the personal stories with their revue counterparts could make me care about the four clichés involved. Besides, the show does not even have the courage of its maudlin pessimism, for, like refugees from a William Inge play, the couples re-form, ready to go on making the best of a bad situation. Since all the resurrected Follies numbers pair the aging performer with a shadow self, I suspect Goldman and Sondheim of going for the tears in it all. If so, they fail, for the numbers, at their best, work as Keeler and Kelly do in *No, No, Nanette.* "I'm Still Here", sings Yvonne De Carlo, in a pure survival number, and when Ethel Shutta breaks into "Broadway Babe" or Fifi D'Orsay warbles "Ah, Paris!", the still here-ness of the show triumphs over the muted weepiness of the script.

70 Girls 70, the John Kander-Fred Ebb musical which came and went far too quickly last spring (it is now available on records), is much the most ambitious of the old-performer shows, tough where *Follies* is spongy, triumphant where *Follies* is lachrymose. In terms of conventional plot, it is pretty much of a shambles, and there are bits, songs, whole scenes that are almost embarrassing, but out of the mishmash a strong show emerges — touching occasionally, but always with the edge of the knife just under the softness, as one would expect from Ebb and Kander. Or such a show emerged when I saw it in Philadelphia. The musical is about a bunch of aging actors who are putting on a show about a bunch of fur-swiping old folks. The performers — except the young man who plays the stage manager — are, or are supposed to be, over 65. The lesson of the thieving plot, that activity is better than vegetation, that life should not stop short of death, gets its vitality from the theatrical frame, not from the preachiness of the plot itself. The frame becomes the opportunity and the excuse to introduce much direct comment on the difficulties of old age, but the dramatic spine of the theatrical story is finally more important than any incidental comment. The assumption throughout — as in the song that Lillian Hayman and Goldye Shaw sing, supposedly to cover time lost through the snags and slowness of old-timers' fumbling with their costume changes — is that here is a group of people, working against their waning powers to put on a show that urges old people to do just that, to say "Yes" to life, as the final song says. And the "Yes" has such force that the waning is scarcely visible.

Yet mortality hangs over the show — not a threat, not a warning, simply a fact. With "The Elephant Song", the number that most delighted me, that fact becomes concrete. When Mildred Natwick — surely one of the best actresses in America — walked on stage, exquisite in a black pantsuit — the most mocking mourning dress I have ever seen — she exuded strength, life, vitality. She climbed up on the piano, crossed her legs and said, "Well, I think we ought to talk about death. Old people do, you know. And so far we've avoided any mention of it. And now, I'd like to sing this death song." "The Elephant Song" is a vigorous nonsense song that makes a hash of the whither-school of death questioners and, although it supplies no answers about elephants, its questions are full of the facts of human death — which is, after all, what the song is really about.

Built into the show from the beginning was the assumption that any of the performers might drop dead, and that possibility — and the refusal to knuckle under to it — is what the show is about. When someone *did* die — David Burns during the Philadelphia try-out — the show shuddered, mourned and then went on. If Burns, who always seemed so indestructible in his fragility, had to die, he chose the right show to die in. "Yes." □

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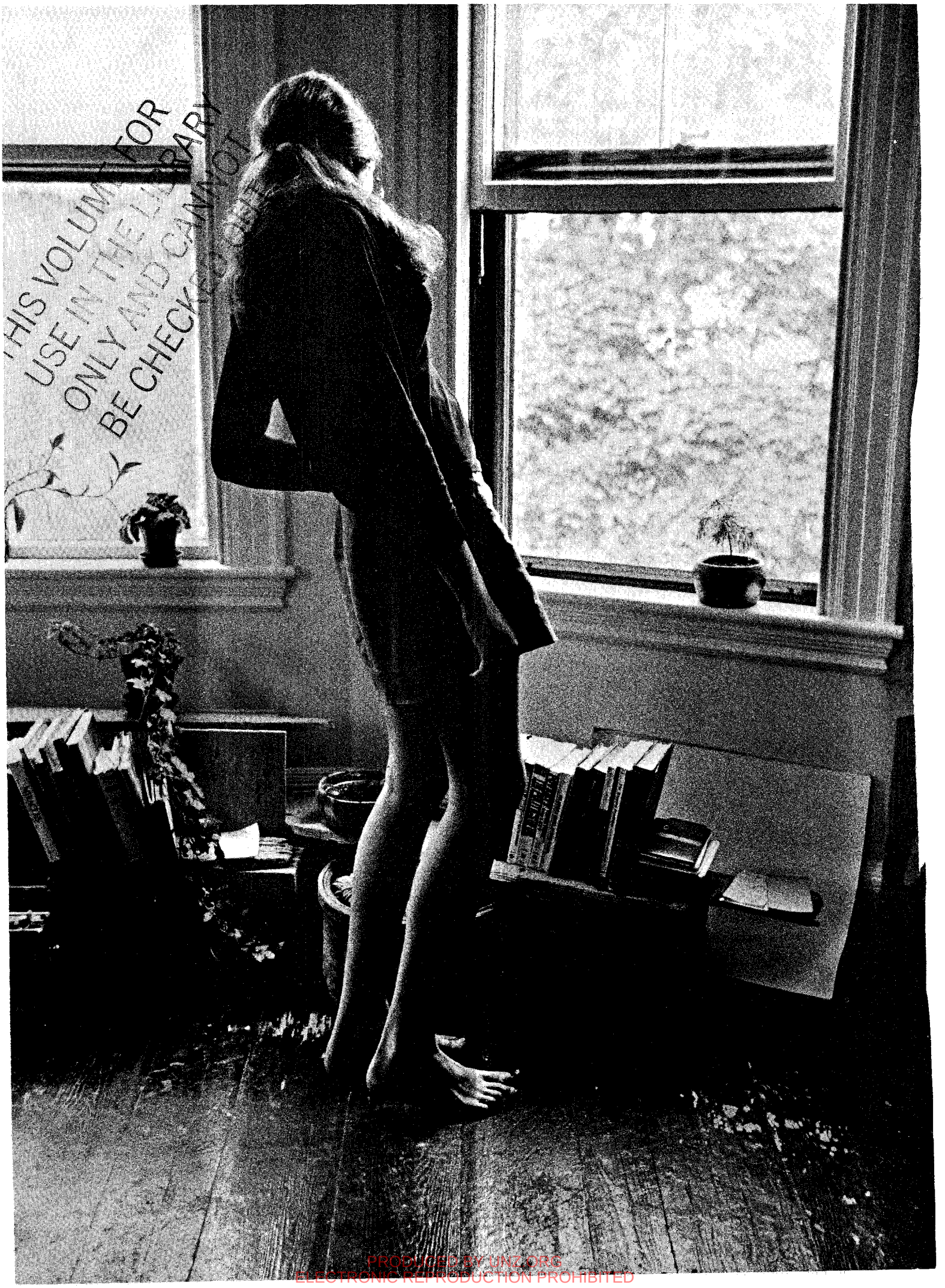
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